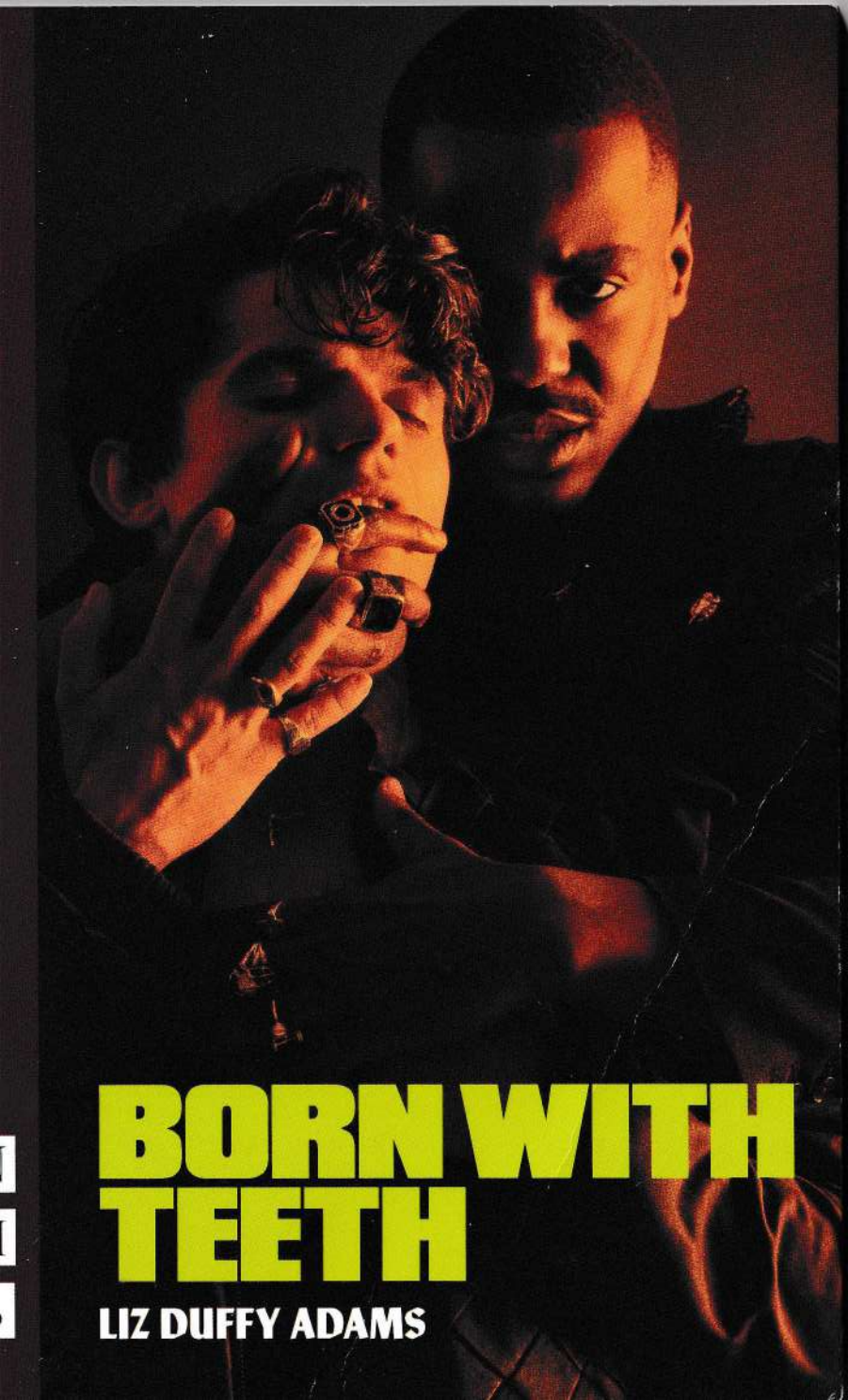




BORN WITH TEETH

LIZ DUFFY ADAMS

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Born With Teeth received its world premiere production
at the Alley Theatre, Houston, Texas.
This production was first performed at Wyndham's Theatre,
London, on 13 August 2025

BORN WITH TEETH

Produced by Matthew Byam Shaw, Nia Janis and Nick Salmon for Playful Productions, the Royal Shakespeare Company, and Elizabeth Williams Tulchin Bartner, Jack M. Dalglish, Eilene Davidson Productions, Remmel Dickinson and Eric Kuhn

CAST

KIT
WILL

KIT (Understudy)
WILL (Understudy)

Ncuti Gatwa
Edward Bluemel

Justice Ritchie
Matt Pettifor

CREATIVE AND PRODUCTION TEAM

Writer
Director
Set and Costume Design
Lighting Design
Sound Design
Video Design and Creation
Casting Director
Movement Director
Fight Director
Intimacy Coordinator

Associate Director
Costume Supervisor
Props Supervisor
Production Manager
Executive Producer
Executive Producer
Company Stage Manager
Deputy Stage Manager
Assistant Stage Manager
Head of Wardrobe
Head of Sound
Deputy Head of Sound
Wardrobe Assistant

Liz Duffy Adams
Daniel Evans
Joanna Scotcher
Neil Austin
George Dennis
Andrzej Goulding
Charlotte Sutton CDG for RSC
Ira Mandela Siobhan
Kev McCurdy
Katharine Hardman
for EK Intimacy
Isabel Marr
Zoë Thomas-Webb
Jamie Owens
Kate West
Jack Lea for Playful Productions
Despina Tsatsas for RSC
Katie Thackeray
Ray Young
Robyn-Amber Manners
Chris Cope
El Theodorou
Niki Hulme
Nella Guess

Running Time: 1 Hour 30 Minutes

NCUTI GATWA

Kit

Ncuti Gatwa is a Rwandan-Scottish BAFTA award-winning actor.

In 2025, audiences saw Ncuti depart his BAFTA award-winning role of The Doctor in *Doctor Who* after two full seasons and three special episodes in the role. In 2023, audiences saw Ncuti unveiled as the 15th Doctor as he bi-generated from David Tennant's Doctor at the end of *The Gigggle*, the final of the Doctor Who 60th Anniversary Specials. In his tenure, Ncuti led opposite three companions (Millie Gibson, Varada Sethu and Nicola Coughlan), and was joined by a host of guest stars including Jonah Hauer-King, Ariyon Bakare, Callie Cooke and Rose Ayling-Ellis. For this role, Ncuti has won a BAFTA Cymru Award, and has been nominated for a Critics Choice Award and BAFTA Scotland Audience Award; the show is broadcast across BBC One and BBC iPlayer in the UK and Ireland, and across the world globally on Disney+.

Over the summer of 2025 Ncuti will be seen opposite Olivia Colman and Benedict Cumberbatch in Jay Roach's movie *The Roses*, a reimagining of the iconic *The War of the Roses*, also starring Kate McKinnon and Allison Janney.

In 2024, Ncuti made his National Theatre debut as Algernon Moncrieff in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The play opened to rave reviews and was nominated for an Olivier Award in the category of 'Best Revival'.

Ncuti is perhaps best known for his BAFTA award-winning

role of Eric Effiong, one of the leading roles in Netflix's hugely successful comedy series *Sex Education*. Created by Laurie Nunn, the show also stars Asa Butterfield, Gillian Anderson and Emma Mackey. All four seasons of the show are available worldwide on Netflix. In 2023, he appeared in *Barbie* opposite Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling, playing a version of Ken in the film hit of the summer. He also played a guest role in *Masters of the Air* for Apple TV+ opposite a cast led by Callum Turner, Barry Keoghan and Austin Butler.

In 2023, Ncuti performed at King Charles' Coronation Concert, playing Romeo opposite Mei Mac as his Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* for the Royal Shakespeare Company. The performance was the first ever collaboration between the royal patronages and included The Royal Ballet, The Royal Opera, The Royal College of Music and The Royal College of Art.

EDWARD BLUEMEL

Will

Edward Bluemel trained at the prestigious Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama and has since built a dynamic and wide-ranging career across film, television and theatre.

He starred as Lord Guildford Dudley in the Amazon Prime series *My Lady Jane*, appearing alongside Emily Bader, Dominic Cooper and Rob Brydon. The genre-bending historical drama has been met with critical acclaim, with Edward's performance earning particular praise.

He also starred as Levi in the BBC's breakout comedy-drama *We Might Regret This*, created by Kyla Harris and Lee Getty. The show quickly became a hit with audiences and critics alike and has already been commissioned for a second series.

Edward will appear in the Netflix adaptation of Agatha Christie's *The Seven Dials Mystery*, playing Jimmy Thesiger. He stars opposite Mia McKenna-Bruce, Martin Freeman and Helena Bonham Carter in what is expected to be a bold and stylish reimagining of the classic mystery.

His other notable television credits include *Belgravia: The Next Chapter*, *Washington Black*, *Ten Percent*, *A Discovery of Witches*, *Killing Eve*, *Sex Education*, *Traitors*, *The Halcyon* and *Holby City*.

On film, Edward has appeared in *Persuasion*, based on the beloved Jane Austen novel, starring alongside Dakota Johnson and Richard E. Grant, and directed by Carrie Cracknell. His earlier film credits include *Access All Areas*, in which he starred opposite Ella Purnell and Georgie Henley.

Edward's theatre work includes leading roles in Trevor Nunn's critically acclaimed *Love in Idleness* (Apollo) and *Vicky Jones' Touch* (Soho), where he earned praise for his stage presence and versatility.

With a growing body of diverse and compelling work, Edward Bluemel continues to establish himself as one of the UK's most exciting talents.

JUSTICE RITCHIE

Understudy Kit

Justice is a British actor and graduate of the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, where he was awarded the BBC Radio Drama Award in his final year.

Theatre includes: *Dear Elizabeth* (Gate Theatre); *Human Nurture* (Theatre Centre); *The Importance of Being Earnest* (ETT).

Film includes: *Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves* (Paramount Pictures).

Radio includes: *What's Love Got to Do With It?*, *The Train at Platform 4*, *Harland, Berlin Alexanderplatz*, *A Matter of Life and Death*, *File on 4: Detained and Restrained - Britain's Vulnerable Kids*, *Broken Colours*, and *Life Lines* (BBC Radio 4); *Wunderkind* (BBC Radio 3).

MATT PETTIFOR

Understudy Will

Matt trained at Manchester School of Theatre and National Youth Music Theatre.

Theatre includes: Off-Stage *Cover* in *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (Theatre Royal Bath); Herr Zeller in *The Sound of Music* (Chichester Festival Theatre); Belvoir in *The Beau Defeated* and Ferdinand in *The Duchess of Malfi* (Manchester School of Theatre); Leo Frank in *Parade*, The Boatman in *Sunday In The Park With George*, and Wilfred Gambles in *Brass* (National Youth Music Theatre).

Other credits include: *Doctors* (BBC); *Merry Christmas* by Stephen Leacock (Northern Broadsides).

LIZ DUFFY ADAMS

Playwright

Liz Duffy Adams is a playwright whose play *Born With Teeth* received a 2021 Edgerton Foundation New Play Award and premiered at the Alley Theatre, a production that won Houston Press Awards' Best Play/Production, and moved to the Guthrie Theatre, Asolo Rep and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Her Neo-Restoration Comedy *Or* premiered off-Broadway at WP Theater and has been produced more than 80 times since, including at Magic Theater in San Francisco, Seattle Rep and Round House Theatre in DC.

Other plays include *Dog Act* (Will Glickman Award for Best New Play); *Witch Hunt* or *A Discourse on the Wonders of the Invisible World* (Contemporary American Theatre Festival) and *The Salonnières* (Greater Boston Theater Company), among others.

Adams has received a seven-year New Dramatists residency, Women of Achievement Award, Lillian Hellman Award, and Fellowships from MacDowell, New York Foundation for the Arts and Massachusetts Cultural Council.

Publications include *Or* in Smith & Kraus' 'Best Plays Of 2010'; *Dog Act* in 'Geek Theater: Anthology of Science Fiction and Fantasy Plays' (Underwords Press 2014); *Poodle with Guitar and Dark Glasses* in Applause's 'Best American Short Plays 2000-2001'; and acting editions by TRW Plays, Playscripts, Inc., and Dramatists Play Service.

Adams has an MFA from Yale School of Drama and a BFA from NYU's Experimental Theater

Wing. She holds dual Irish and American citizenship and is based in New York City and Western Massachusetts.

lizduffyadams.com

DANIEL EVANS

Director

Daniel Evans is Co-Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company alongside Tamara Harvey. He is also a double Olivier award-winning actor and director. In 2016, he was appointed Artistic Director of Chichester Festival Theatre. During his tenure, CFT produced 17 world premieres, while five shows transferred to London or Broadway. Between 2009-16, he was Artistic Director at Sheffield Theatres which won Best Regional Theatre for an unprecedented consecutive two years running. Both his Olivier awards were given for performances in Sondheim musicals: *Merrily We Roll Along* at the Donmar Warehouse and *Sunday in the Park with George* at the Menier Chocolate Factory, which transferred to Wyndham's before moving to Studio 54 on Broadway, where he received a Tony nomination. He has acted in world premieres by Sarah Kane, Peter Gill and Christopher Shinn; and directed plays by Shakespeare, Ibsen, David Hare and Lucy Prebble, and musicals by Rodgers and Hammerstein, Knopfle and Grieg and Tim Firth. Daniel trained at the Guildhall School.

JOANNA SCOTCHER

Set and Costume Design

Theatre includes: *Titus Andronicus* and *Love's Labour's*

Lost (RSC); *Redlands, The Vortex, Doubt: A Parable* and *Sing Yer Heart Out for the Lads* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Black Superhero* (Royal Court); *Macbeth* (Almeida); *Fantastically Great Women Who Changed the World* (Theatre Royal Stratford East and UK Tour); *Women Beware Women* (Shakespeare's Globe); *Love, Love, Love* (Lyric Hammersmith); *Emilia* (Shakespeare's Globe and West End); *Mother Courage, Anna Karenina* and *The Rolling Stone* (Royal Exchange, Headlong); *The Village* (Stratford East); *Cuttin' It* (Young Vic, Royal Court, Birmingham Rep and Sheffield Theatres); *Winter, Two Endless Moments* and *A Harlem Dream* (Young Vic); *Pests* (Clean Break, Royal Court and Royal Exchange); *Katie Roche* (Abbey, Dublin); *Boys Will Be Boys* (Bush, Headlong); and *The Railway Children* (Kings Cross, Waterloo and Toronto).

Opera includes: *She Described it to Death* and *Current Rising* (Royal Opera House).

Joanna was awarded the Olivier award for Best Costume Design for her work on *Emilia* and a WhatsOnStage award for Best Set Designer for *The Railway Children*.

NEIL AUSTIN Lighting Design

West End includes: *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (Palace); *Frozen* (Theatre Royal Drury Lane); *Inside No. 9 Stage/Fright*, *Leopoldstadt* and *Red* (Wyndham's); *Shifters* (Duke of York's and Bush); *Medea* (@ sohoplace); *The Pillowman*, *Rosmersholm* and *Ink* (Duke of York's); *Company* (Gielgud); *The Night of the Iguana*, *Shakespeare*

in Love, *Photograph 51* and *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (Noël Coward); *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?* (Haymarket); and *Bend It Like Beckham* (Phoenix).

Broadway includes: *Tammy Faye*; *Leopoldstadt*; *Company*; *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*; *Ink*; *Travesties*; *Hughie*; *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*; *Evita*; *Red*; *Hamlet*; *The Seafarer*; and *Frost/Nixon*.

Other recent shows include: *Love's Labour's Lost* (RSC); *The Secret Life of Bees*, *Albion* and *The Hunt* (Almeida); *The 47th* (Old Vic); *After Life* and *Translations* (National Theatre); and *Blues in the Night* (Kiln).

Neil is the recipient of three Tony Awards, two Olivier Awards and two Drama Desk Awards.

GEORGE DENNIS Sound Design

Theatre includes: *Twelfth Night*, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Venice Preserved* (RSC); *Alterations*, *Blues for an Alabama Sky* and *An Octoroon* (National Theatre); *Intimate Apparel* and *Clyde's* (Donmar); *The Homecoming* (Trafalgar – Olivier award nomination for Best Sound Design); *The Seagull*, *Lemons, Lemons, Lemons*, *Lemons* and *Pinter at the Pinter* 1, 2 & 7 (Harold Pinter); *The Effect* (The Shed, NY and National Theatre); *Sweat* (Gielgud and Donmar); *Nine Night* (Trafalgar and National Theatre); *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Vaudeville); *English* (Kiln and RSC); *Roots*, *The Duchess of Malfi* and *Three Sisters* (Almeida); *The Cabinet Minister* (Menier Chocolate Factory); *The Homecoming*, *Further Than*

The Furthest Thing and *The Mountaintop* (Young Vic); *Poor Clare* (Orange Tree); *Straight Line Crazy* (The Shed, NY and Bridge); *Mom, How Did You Meet The Beatles*, *Sing Yer Heart Out for the Lads*, *The Deep Blue Sea* and *The Norman Conquests* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *A Taste of Honey* and *Glee & Me* (Manchester Royal Exchange); *The Southbury Child* and *Two Ladies* (Bridge); *Talent*, *Frost/Nixon* and *Tribes* (Sheffield Crucible); *Hedda Tesman* and *Spring Awakening* (Headlong); *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Imogen* and *The Taming of the Shrew* (Shakespeare's Globe); *Harrogate*, *Fireworks* and *Liberian Girl* (Royal Court); and *Julie* (Internationale Theater Amsterdam).

ANDRZEJ GOULDING

Video Design and Creation

Andrzej Goulding is an award-winning Video Designer and Creator who has worked in the UK and internationally across many forms of live performance.

Video Design includes: *Just for One Day* (Old Vic and Shaftesbury); *42 Balloons* (The Lowry and Chicago Shakespeare Theatre); *Starlight Express* (Tribadour Wembley Park); *People, Places and Things* (National Theatre, West End and St Ann's Warehouse); *Indigo* (also set design) and *Muriel's Wedding* (Leicester Curve); *The Unfriend* (West End); *& Juliet* (Broadway, West End and World Tour); *Groundhog Day* (Broadway and Old Vic); *Miss Saigon* (Sheffield Crucible); *Sylvia* and *Eureka Day* (Old Vic); *The Time Traveller's Wife* (West End); *I Should Be So Lucky* (UK Tour); *Message In A Bottle* (West End and World Tour); *Life of Pi* (Broadway, West End and

World Tour); *Burn* (Edinburgh International Festival); *The Da Vinci Code* (UK Tour); *The Drifters Girl* (West End and UK Tour); *Room* (Theatre Royal Stratford East, Toronto and Broadway); *Henry V* (Donmar and NT Live); *The Unreturning* (also set design) (UK Tour); *Pressure* (West End, UK Tour and Toronto); *The Girl On The Train* (UK Tour and West End); *Coriolanus* (Donmar and NT Live); *1984* (Northern Ballet and Sadler's Wells); *Frost/Nixon* (Sheffield Crucible); *Carousel* (Barbican) and *Kiki's Delivery Service* (Southwark Playhouse).

Awards include: Tony Award, Drama Desk Award, Outer Critics Circle Award, Olivier Award, UK Theatre Award, Broadway World Award (*Life Of Pi*); two WhatsOnStage Awards (*& Juliet* and *Starlight Express*); Theatre and Technology Award (*Room*).

agoulding.com

CHARLOTTE SUTTON CDG Casting Director for the RSC

Charlotte Sutton CDG is the Head of Casting at the Royal Shakespeare Company, where her credits include: *The Constant Wife*, *Hamlet*, *Hail to the Thief*, *Hamlet*, *The Red Shoes*, *Pericles* and *Love's Labour's Lost*.

Other theatre includes: *Guys and Dolls* (Bridge); *The Unfriend* (Chichester Festival Theatre, Criterion and Wyndham's); *The Secret Life of Bees* (Almeida); *Best of Enemies* and *Death of a Salesman* (Young Vic and West End); *Further than the Furthest Thing*, *Fairview*, *The Convert*, *trade and Dutchman* (Young Vic); *Our Generation* (Chichester Festival Theatre and National Theatre); *The*

Inquiry, Assassins, Local Hero, The Famous Five, Sing Yer Heart Out for the Lads, Doubt, Oklahoma!, The Deep Blue Sea, The Watsons, Cock, Flowers for Mrs Harris, The Meeting, random/generations, Quiz, Fiddler on the Roof, Strife and Mack and Mabel (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Caroline, or Change* (Chichester Festival Theatre, Hampstead and Playhouse); *South Pacific* (Sadler's Wells, Chichester Festival Theatre and UK Tour); *Cock* (Ambassadors); *Company* (Gielgud); *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (Wyndham's, BAM and LA); and *wonderland, The Light Princess, Emil and the Detectives* and *The Elephantom* (National Theatre).

Film includes: *Disenchanted* (UK casting) and *Mufasa: The Lion King* (Taka Cub and Chigaru Casting).

Awards include CDG award for Best Casting in Musical Theatre (*Guys and Dolls*) and CDG award for Best Casting in Theatre (*Our Generation*).

ISABEL MARR

Associate Director

Isabel is a director for stage and screen who has worked extensively across the West End, at the Bridge and at Shakespeare's Globe.

She was co-director of the award-winning, Olivier-nominated play *2:22 A Ghost Story*, alongside Matthew Dunster. Having been with the show since its first run at the Noël Coward theatre in 2021, Isabel and Matthew have seen the 'bona fide West End phenomenon' (*Time Out*) through record-breaking seasons across five different West End theatres,

as well as a year-long tour of the UK and Ireland.

Isabel has a passion for new writing and is currently developing new work with several writers and producers. Her past directing work includes *Deep Night, Dark Night* at Shakespeare's Globe, a series of horror plays which Isabel also curated featuring new writing from Jeanette Winterson, Morgan Lloyd Malcolm, Diana Evans, Sami Ibrahim, Abi Zakarian, Laura Lomas and Michelle Terry.

Isabel is about to direct her first short film, *The Son in Law*, written by Lucinda Coxon. The film is produced by Matt Wilkinson for Stigma Films and Ridley Scott Associates. She is currently developing a feature idea with Stigma Films based on an adaptation of a cult classic novel.

Isabel has worked as an associate director to Nicholas Hytner, Matthew Dunster, Robert Hastie, Dominic Dromgoole and Mark Gatiss.

IRA MANDELA SIOBHAN

Movement Director

As a performer, theatre includes: The title role in *Milma's Tale* (Kiln); *Robin Hood: The Legend, Re-written* (Regent's Park Open Air); *My Brilliant Friend* (National Theatre); *Equus* (ETT and Trafalgar Studios); *The Lion, The Witch & The Wardrobe* (Leeds Playhouse); *My Brilliant Friend - Parts 1 & 2* (Rose Theatre Kingston); *Mosquitoes* (National Theatre); *Imogen* (Shakespeare's Globe); *Running Wild* (Regent's Park Open Air); *Everyman* and *Macbeth* (National Theatre); *The Wind in the Willows* (Vaudeville); *The Drowned Man*;

A Hollywood Fable (Punchdrunk); *A Season in the Congo and Feast* (Young Vic); *Can We Talk About This* (DV8); *Lifeguard* (National Theatre of Scotland); and *Fela!* (National Theatre).

Film includes: *Barbie: Mission Impossible 7: Dead Reckoning Part One*; *London Road*; *Pan: Desert Dancer*; and *To Be Straight With You* (DV8).

TV includes: *The Crown* (Netflix); *History of a Pleasure Seeker* (Disney+); *The Third Day* (Punchdrunk and Sky 1); *Brave New World* (Sky) and *The Last Hours of Lisa Lopes* (ITV).

Movement direction credits include: *Mosquitoes* and *The Grapes of Wrath* (National Theatre); Associate on *Milma's Tale* (Kiln); *Manic Street Creature* (Southwark Playhouse); *16 Postcodes* and *Addictive Beat* (Boundless Theatre) and *Strike* (Southwark Playhouse).

Currently working on *Hamlet* (National Theatre) and *The BFG* (RSC).

KEV McCURDY

Fight Director

Kev is an Equity-registered Fight Director of 25 years, stage combat tutor of 34 years and co-founder of The Academy of Performance Combat. Kev teaches at The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and has been a guest instructor at universities in Oklahoma and Missouri, and workshops in Norway, Sweden, Finland, Canada and Australia.

Upcoming fight choreographing projects include: *The Hunger Games On Stage* (Troubadour Canary Wharf),

Theatre includes: *Sister Act* (UK Tour, Palladium and Dominion); *Les Misérables* (Sondheim); *The Phantom of the Opera* (His Majesty's); *Barbarians, Mandala, Hamlet, Nora: A Doll's House, The Homecoming, Fairview* and *The Little Foxes* (Young Vic); *Jitney* (Old Vic); *A Streetcar Named Desire, West Side Story* and *Billy Elliot* (Leicester Curve); *Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em* (UK Tour); *Moreno* (Theatre503); *Nine Night* (Leeds Playhouse); *Gunpowder Plot* (Tower of London, Layered Reality); *Guardians of The Galaxy* (Secret Cinema); *Trouble In Butetown* and *The Fear Of 13* (Donmar); *Brokeback Mountain* (@sohplace); *The Wizard Of Oz* (Palladium and UK Tour); *The Beaux Strategem, The Motherfu**er with the Hat, Anthony and Cleopatra, Othello* and *Till the Stars Come Down* (National Theatre); *Tambo & Bones* (Theatre Royal Stratford East); *Carrie: The Musical* and *Julius Caesar* (Richard Burton Theatre, Cardiff); *Macbeth* (Bristol Old Vic); *Enemy of the People* (Duke Of York's); *Out of Season* (Hampstead); *One Man Two Guvnors* (Everyman Open Air Festival); *An Officer and a Gentleman* (UK Tour); *Player Kings* (Noël Coward and UK Tour); *The Lightning Child, Eyam, The Duchess Of Malfi, Othello, Edward II, All's Well That Ends Well, Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Crucible* (Shakespeare's Globe); *The Play That Goes Wrong* (Duchess); *Red Pitch* (Bush and @sohplace); *Wolves On Road* (Bush); *Stranger Things: The First Shadow* (Phoenix); and *O Island, Ivy Tiller: Vicar's Daughter, Squirrel Killer, The Box Of Delights, The Tempest, Cymbeline, Othello, The Buddha of Suburbia* and *Hamlet Hail To The Thief* (RSC).

Opera includes: *Bajazet* (Irish National Opera Tour); *Carmen* and *The Barber Of Seville* (Garsington Opera); *Rigoletto*, *Don Giovanni*, *Jenufa* and *Candide* (Welsh National Opera); *Jephta*, *Rigoletto*, *Don Giovanni* and *Bajazet* (Royal Opera House); *Semele*, *Don Giovanni* and *Saul* (Glyndebourne); and *Carmen* (Waterperry Opera).

Film includes: *Season of the Witch*; *John Carter of Mars*; *Protein*; *The Mill Killers*; and *The Lady of Heaven*.

TV includes: *EastEnders*; *Doctor Who*; *The Pact Season 2*; *Hollyoaks*; *The A List Season 2*; *Until I Kill You*; *Pobol Y Cwm*; *Bariaw Seasons 1 & 2*; and *The Undisclosed War*.

KATHARINE HARDMAN

Intimacy Coordinator
for EK INTIMACY

EK Intimacy is an industry-leading intimacy coordinating company, founded by Katharine Hardman and Elle McAlpine.

Theatre includes: *The Grapes of Wrath* (National Theatre); *The Confessions and Faith*, *Hope and Charity* for A Zeldin Company (National Theatre and International Tour); and *Our Last First* (Union Theatre).

TV includes: as Lead Intimacy Coordinator: *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* (Sky); and *The Great Series 3* (Channel 4/Hulu).

As Intimacy Coordinator: *The Witcher Series 4*, *One Day*, *Everything Now*, *Sex Education Series 4* and *Baby Reindeer* (Netflix); *Franklin and Silo* (Apple TV+); *Curfew* and *Insomnia* (Paramount+); *Dope Girls* and

The Winter King (Sony); *Gangs of London series 3*, *The Lazarus Project series 2* and *Brassic Series 4* (Sky); *Interview With The Vampire series 2* (AMC); *Such Brave Girls*, *Wolf and Best Interests* (BBC); *Playing Nice*, *The Marlow Murder Club series 2*, *Without Sin* and *DI Ray* (ITV); *Generation Z*, *The Gathering* and *The Undeclared War* (Channel 4); *The Great series 1-2* (Channel 4/Hulu); and *The Offenders* (Amazon).

As Assistant Intimacy Coordinator: *Brave New World* (Sky).

Film includes: *Good Thanks, You?*; and *Rise*.

ZOE THOMAS-WEBB

Costume Supervisor

As Associate Costume Designer: *Pericles* (RSC); *Nye* (National Theatre); *Groundhog Day* (Old Vic); *Black Superhero* (Royal Court); and *Lessons in Love and Violence* (Gran Teatre de Liceu).

As Costume Supervisor: *Top Hat* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Titus Andronicus* (RSC); *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (Wyndham's); *Boys on the Verge of Tears* (Soho); *Hamilton* (UK Tour); *Rock Follies* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Matthew Bourne's Sleeping Beauty* (UK Tour); and *The 47th* (Old Vic).

JAMIE OWENS

Props Supervisor

Recent productions include: *The Producers*, *The Real Thing*, *Babies*, *Power of Sail* and *Pacific Overtures* (West End); *Doubt* and *A View From the Bridge* (Theatre Royal Bath); *The Caretaker*, *The Vortex* and *Redlands* (Chichester

Festival Theatre); and *Calamity Jane*, *The Full Monty* and *Pride and Prejudice* ('sort of) (UK Tour).

KATE WEST

Production Manager

Recent productions include: *Anna Karenina* *The Unfriend*, *8 Hotels* and *The Meeting* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Giant* (Harold Pinter); *My Master Builder*, *Oedipus* (Wyndham's); *The Seagull* (Barbican); *Unicorn*, *Orlando* (Garrick); *Barcelona* (Duke of York's); *Waiting for Godot* (Haymarket); *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*, *The Other Boleyn Girl* *The Three Billy Goats Gruff Assassins* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Slave Play* (Noël Coward); *Nachtland* (Young Vic); *Hills Of California* (Harold Pinter); *The Unfriend* (Chichester Festival Theatre, Criterion and Wyndham's); *Back Stairs Billy* (Duke of York's); *The Old Man and the Pool* (Wyndham's); *Operation Mincemeat* (Fortune); *Aspects of Love* (Lyric); *Women Beware the Devil* (Almeida); *As You Like It* (@sohoplace); *John Gabriel Borkman*, *Book of Dust*, *Bach and Sons*, *The Lion*, *The Witch and The Wardrobe*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Alys Always*, *Allelujah!*, *My Name is Lucy Barton* and *Julius Caesar* (Bridge); *The Blue Woman* and *Lohengrin* (Royal Opera House); *The Son* (Duke of York's); *Love and Other Acts of Violence*, *Blindness*, *Teenage Dick*, *Europe*, *Sweet Charity*, *St Nicholas*, *Sweat*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *The Way of the World* (Donmar); *Imperium* (Gielgud); *The Band* (UK Tour and Haymarket); *Common* (National Theatre); *42nd Street* (Theatre Royal Drury Lane); *Flowers for Mrs Harris* (Sheffield Crucible); *The Caretaker* (Old Vic); and *Hamlet* (Barbican).

PLAYFUL PRODUCTIONS

Producer and General Manager

Founded by Matthew Byam Shaw, Nia Janis and Nick Salmon in 2010, Playful Productions is celebrating its 15th birthday as one of the most eminent independent theatre producers in the West End. Alongside its producing work, Playful is also a full-service executive producer and general management company.

As Producer and General Manager productions include: *All My Sons*, *Born With Teeth* (Wyndham's); *The Unbelievers* (Royal Court); *Make It Happen* (Dundee Rep and Edinburgh International Festival); *The Fifth Step* (@sohoplace); *Buena Vista Social Club* (Broadway); *Dr. Strangelove* (Noël Coward and Bord Gáis, Dublin); *Macbeth* (Harold Pinter); *The Artist* (Theatre Royal Plymouth); *Groundhog Day* (The Old Vic and Princess Theatre, Melbourne); *MJ The Musical* (Prince Edward and Broadway) and *The Unfriend* (Chichester Festival Theatre, Criterion and Wyndham's).

As Executive Producer productions include *Moulin Rouge! The Musical* (Piccadilly); *MJ The Musical* (Prince Edward) and *Wild Rose* (Royal Lyceum, Edinburgh – also General Manager); additionally, Executive Producer on the multi-Emma-award-winning Netflix TV series *The Crown* based on *The Audience*.

As General Manager productions include: *Wicked* (Apollo Victoria, UK and Ireland Tours and International Tour) and *Moulin Rouge! The Musical* (Piccadilly).

playfuluk.com

**ROYAL SHAKESPEARE
COMPANY**
Producer

The Royal Shakespeare Company's mission is to inspire deeper human understanding through the power of theatre. Shakespeare's restless exploration of all of humanity is our inspiration and touchstone, connecting us, creating opportunities and bringing joy.

The Company's roots lie in the bold vision of a local brewer, Edward Fordham Flower, who in 1879 established a theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon with his son Charles. The RSC as we know it today was formed by Sir Peter Hall, whose ambition was to produce new plays alongside those of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. We continue this today across our three permanent theatres in Stratford – the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, the Swan Theatre and The Other Place – and in communities and schools across the nation, online and around the globe. We believe everybody's life can be enriched by culture and creativity. Our transformative Creative Learning and Engagement programmes reach over half a million young people and adults each year. We have worked with generations of the very best theatre makers and we continue to nurture the talent of the future.

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ELIZABETH WILLIAMS
Producer

Originally an art historian/archaeologist, Elizabeth Williams began her career in theatre while Art Advisor and VP of Mutual Benefit Productions, US financiers for Cameron Mackintosh's *Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Miss Saigon*.

She is a producer and financier of many shows, including multiple Olivier, Tony and Pulitzer Prize winners. On Broadway: *Into the Woods*, *The Gospel at Colonus*, *The Secret Garden*, *Crazy for You* (also West End), *Moon Over Buffalo*, *Electra*, *The Music Man*, *Noises Off*, *Cabaret at Studio 54*, *The Elephant Man*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, *Gypsy*, *Topdog/Underdog*, *Bombay Dreams*, *Catch Me if You Can*, *Waiting for Godot/No Man's Land*, *Matilda*.

In the West End: *The Real Thing* (also Broadway), *Boston Marriage*, *Lobby Hero*, *Woman in White*, *Hitchcock Blonde*, *A Servant of Two Masters*, *By the Bog of Cats*, *Ragtime*, *Spring Awakening*, *The Bodyguard*, *Hairspray*, *Aspects of Love*. Currently, *Grease: The Ultimate Movie Musical* with Secret Cinema and TodayTix Live/Merritt Baer.

Elizabeth is honoured to work with long-time colleagues Playful Productions and the Royal Shakespeare Company to bring Liz Duffy Adams' *Born With Teeth* to Wyndham's.

Working again with the RSC is the culmination of a career: it was the phenomenon that is *Les Misérables*, and prior to that *Nicholas Nickleby* (viewed with her husband while grad students

at Columbia), that inspired an archaeologist to become a producer.

TULCHIN BARTNER
Co-Producer

Tulchin Bartner Productions is a Tony and Olivier award-winning production company with a focus on West End plays and early stage development. Currently represented in the West End by *Cabaret* and *The Book of Mormon*, and on Broadway by *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*. Recent London highlights include: *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, *The Years*, *Oedipus*, *Shifters*, *Dr. Strangelove*, *Macbeth* with Ralph Fiennes and Indira Varma, *Sister Act*, *The Motive and the Cue*, *Hamnet*, *Dr Semmelweis*, *Patriots*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *Leopoldstadt*, *The Ferryman*, *The Drifters Girl*, *Get Up*, *Stand Up!*, *Come From Away*, *Life of Pi*, *The Inheritance*, *King Charles III*, *Sunny Afternoon* and *Jerusalem*. Upcoming: *All My Sons* with Bryan Cranston and *To Kill A Mockingbird* UK Tour. Past Broadway highlights include: *The Lehman Trilogy*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *Network*, *The River*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *La Cage aux Folles*, *The Norman Conquests*, *Boeing-Boeing* and *Company*. Off-Broadway: *Angry Alan* starring John Krasinski and *Vanya* with Andrew Scott.

JACK M. DALGLEISH
Co-Producer

Jack M. Dalgleish is a Tony and Olivier award-winning producer of theatre and film. His Broadway and West End credits include *Spring Awakening*, *Some Like It Hot* and *Zanna, Don't!* He is

currently co-producing *Grease: The Immersive Movie Musical* with Secret Cinema and developing a new narrative feature based on *Some of Tim's Stories* by S.E. Hinton (*The Outsiders*). Jack specialises in developing story-driven work across genres and collaborates closely with artists to bring inventive, emotionally resonant productions to life on stage and screen. He was an executive producer on the feature film *Jeremy Fink and the Meaning of Life*, starring Mira Sorvino, Joe Pantoliano and Michael Urie. A reformed attorney and CPA, Jack brings legal and financial expertise to his work as a creative producer, driven by a passion for storytelling and artistic collaboration.

**EILENE DAVIDSON
PRODUCTIONS**
Co-Producer

Eilene Davidson is an award-winning international producer working on Broadway and in the West End.

New shows opening this autumn include: *ART* and *Hand of God* in New York City; the new musical *Coven* at Kiln; the West End transfer of *Punch*; and *All My Sons* in the West End. Recent critically acclaimed shows include *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* and *The Merchant of Venice 1936*. She has mostly recently been a co-producer on *My Master Builder* at Wyndham's.

Recent co-produced Broadway productions include: *Vanya*, *Redwood*, *Prima Facie*, *Death of a Salesman*, *A Doll's House*, *Plaza Suite*, *Leopoldstadt*, *Walking with Ghosts*, *Betrayal* and *Life of Pi*. Recent UK productions include:

People, Places and Things, Enemy of the People, Macbeth, Red Pitch, The Motive and the Cue, A Christmas Carol, Wagatha Christie, The Last Five Years, Anything Goes, Uncle Vanya, The Grinning Man, A Day in the Death of Joe Egg, The Starry Messenger and the Olivier Award-winning new play *Emilia*.

Eilene formerly worked as an actress and writer in Europe and the USA. Her main interest is in new writing and she was a founder of Stage Traffic, a US/UK company specialising in producing new plays. She is in the President's Circle at BAFTA and serves on various arts boards internationally. Eilene also recently executive produced the critically acclaimed low budget British film *Dragonfly* starring Brenda Blethyn and Andrea Riseborough, and has three new plays currently in development.

REMMEL T. DICKINSON

Co-Producer

Rommel T. Dickinson is a Tony, Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle award winner working in New York, London, Washington, D.C., Seattle, Washington, La Jolla, California, Williamstown, Massachusetts and Little Rock, Arkansas.

Credits include *Grease, The Immersive Production* (London);

Cabaret at the Kitkat Club (New York); *A Wonderful World The Louis Armstrong Musical, Lifespan of a Fact, The Bridges of Madison County, Nice Work If You Can Get It, First Date, The Miracle Worker, A Time To Kill, Catch Me If You Can, The Wizard Of Oz* (London); *Memphis* (New York and London); *Matilda* (New York); *War Horse* (North America); *Sylvia* (London); *The Norman Conquests*.

ERIC KUHN

Co-Producer

A producer of TV, films, documentaries and theatre on the West End and Broadway. Eric has earned three Tony Awards, a Peabody, two GLAAD Awards, a BIFA, and numerous other awards. He serves on the board of New York Stage and Film, where he was previously the Executive Producer, and on the advisory committee of the American Theater Wing.

Currently, his off-Broadway hit show *Invasive Species* is playing in London at the King's Head Theatre.

A big thank you to Matt, Daniel, Jack and the rest of the incredible *Born With Teeth* team for being great friends and partners in this (show) business!

@EricJKuhn

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Sound and Video Equipment
Automation Equipment
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With special thanks to the RSC HR/People team, the RSC Finance Team and the RSC Technical and Production teams for their ongoing support to the production.

BORN WITH TEETH

Liz Duffy Adams

Author's Note

Liz Duffy Adams

A few years ago I read the news: the editors of the New Oxford Shakespeare had concluded that Christopher Marlowe had collaborated with Shakespeare on the three *Henry VI* history plays. And I felt the mad prickling in soles and palms and scalp that tells you, 'Oh, there's something there.'

There's nothing new about the idea of Shakespeare collaborating; Elizabethan playwrights often did and we knew he did too. But that he worked with Kit Marlowe, that was the shock. Marlowe the rock star, the university wit, the brilliantly innovative poet, the player in the murky world of espionage. While Shakespeare was the grammar-school country boy, the actor, the up-and-coming playwright.

You only have to read their work to feel they were radically distinct in sensibility, in world view, in essence. What would they have made of each other? Why did Kit agree to collaborate with Will? How did they in their different ways manage in such a dangerous political time, when being a popular playwright, as Thomas Kyd found, was no protection against arrest and torture?

As much as it reflects the Elizabethan period, the play is about our present moment, as all history plays must be. Belarus Free Theatre's *Burning Doors*, about the suppression of artistic freedoms, was nearly as much an influence as Charles Nicholl's *The Reckoning*, about the death of Marlowe.

History spirals around; authoritarianism is a malignant weed that must be fought back, again and again. The question of how artists navigate such regimes while keeping art – the stuff that makes life worth living – alive, is something I find lastingly of interest.

Introduction

Gabriel Egan

In Liz Duffy Adams's play, Christopher Marlowe is William Shakespeare's co-author on *Henry VI Parts One, Two and Three*. Is there any truth in this?

Adams's play would be a remarkable achievement even if it were mere invention. But it has the additional merit of creatively exploring the implications of a newly discovered historical fact: that Marlowe created a little more than we used to think (and Shakespeare a little less) of the astonishing body of British drama from the late sixteenth century.

In a courtroom a witness is typically told to describe what happened, but 'in your own words'. The comedian George Carlin saw a problem here and asked his audience: 'Do *you* have your own words? I'm using the ones everyone else has been using.' It is commonly claimed that Shakespeare had his own words, in the sense that he invented new words that have entered our shared language. Recently it has been discovered that this is untrue.

We can search in digital databases of all British books published before and during his lifetime for each word that we suspect Shakespeare coined. Except for trivial exceptions, we find in every case that someone else used the word before him. The exceptions are such things as putting the prefix *un-* before an existing verb or noun. Most of Shakespeare's inventions of that kind did not catch on, including 'I am unkinged' (*Richard II*, Act 5, Scene 5), 'unsex me here' (*Macbeth*, Act One, Scene Five), and 'unshout the noise' (*Coriolanus*, Act 5, Scene 5).

Although writers occasionally coin new words, that is not what we usually mean by a writer's personal style. Language is fundamentally dependent on agreement about what the words mean, which limits the opportunities to coin wholly new ones.

Authorial distinctiveness, what we mean by style, lies not in the invention of individual words but in the inventiveness of the order of words chosen by an author.

It is in the nature of language that a writer need put only a few words together to produce a sequence of them that no one has used before. According to Google's search engine, the six-word sequence that I just used, 'the order of words chosen by', has appeared many times in the hundreds of millions of webpages it has indexed. But if we quote just one more word of mine, to make it 'the order of words chosen by an', Google reports never having seen this sequence before.

Publication of this essay might change that result, so the reader is encouraged to take a sample of her own writing and see how few of her words (presented within quotation marks) are needed to get a Google's search to report that it has not seen the sequence before. So few are needed that mere uniqueness of phrasing cannot be the essence of authorial style either. Yet it seems intuitive that authorial style must have something to do with how writers follow one word with another in sequences.

In *Born With Teeth*, Shakespeare confesses himself dazzled by Marlowe's way of combining words. Both were born in 1564, but Marlowe had the creative headstart and by his mid-twenties had written the hit plays *Tamburlaine the Great Parts 1 and 2*, *The Jew of Malta* and *Doctor Faustus*. Marlowe's writing was distinctive, widely admired, and in some ways quite easy to parody. Shakespeare parodied it in *Henry IV Part Two* when Ensign Pistol rants about 'hollow pampered jades of Asia' (Act 2, Scene 4), echoing 'Holla, ye pampered jades of Asia' from Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great Part 2* (Act 4, Scene 3). Enthusiastic theatre-goers of Shakespeare's time, of which there were many, were probably expected to spot this recycled Marlovianism.

But imitation can also be homage rather than parody. Looking up at a beautiful young woman framed in a window, Barabas in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* says, 'But stay: what star shines yonder in the east? / The loadstar of my life, if Abigail' (Act 2, Scene 1). The same likening of a beautiful young woman in

a window to a brightly burning star occurs to Shakespeare's Romeo: 'But soft! What light through yonder window breaks? / It is the East, and Juliet is the sun!' (Act 2, Scene 1).

More subtle signs of Marlowe's influence recur across early modern drama, in the order of selected words, the use of rhythmic language, and in the memorable actions of characters. An example of the last of these is that from her window Abigail throws valuables down to Barabas in *The Jew of Malta*, just as Jessica at her window throws valuables down to Lorenzo in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, the title of which also echoes Marlowe's title.

With Marlowe such an influential figure across early modern drama, admired and imitated by many, it is fair to ask how scholars can hope to distinguish Marlowe's style from that of the writers influenced by him, including Shakespeare. To understand that, the creation of the three *Henry VI* plays that Liz Duffy Adams thrillingly dramatises presents a central test case. In 2016, the General Editors of the New Oxford Shakespeare Complete Works edition from Oxford University Press put Marlowe's name alongside Shakespeare's on the title pages of *Henry VI Parts One, Two and Three*. How could we tell that Marlowe had contributed to these plays?

There is no external evidence that Marlowe had a hand in any of them. *Henry VI Part One* was first published in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, in the first collected-plays edition of Shakespeare, entitled *Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* and now commonly referred to as the First Folio. There were three more editions of this collection later that century, each reprinting its predecessor.

The First Folio collection of 1623 also included *Henry VI Part Two* and *Henry VI Part Three*. But almost thirty years earlier two plays had been published that are strikingly similar to them: one was called *The Contention of York and Lancaster*, published in 1594 and remarkably similar to *Henry VI Part Two*, and the other was called *Richard Duke of York*, published in 1595, which resembles *Henry VI Part Three*.

Scholars disagree about the relationships between *The Contention of York and Lancaster* and *Henry VI Part Two* and between *Richard Duke of York* and *Henry VI Part Three*. Over the centuries the theories offered have included that the plays published in 1594 and 1595 are early versions of two plays that Shakespeare went on to revise to make his *Henry VI Part Two* and *Henry VI Part Three*. Perhaps there was also an early *Henry VI Part One* and it is simply lost.

Another theory is that the plays we find in the 1623 Folio were already written and being performed in the early 1590s, but somehow they got mangled in the process of being printed in 1594 and 1595. Perhaps this happened because the publisher did not have authorised manuscripts of the plays, but only, as it were, pirated copies of the scripts made by some surreptitious process.

Both theories might be true at once. The two play editions of the 1590s might be corrupted versions of two early Shakespeare plays that also differ from their counterparts of 1623 because of authorial or non-authorial revision. Anyone who presents a definitive narrative about the relationships between the two play editions of the 1590s and the ones in the 1623 Folio is claiming more than we currently know (as of mid-2025) about the matter, although of course new information settling the question could emerge at any time.

So, who wrote these four plays? The 1623 Folio attributes to Shakespeare all thirty-six of the plays it collects: his name and the famous engraving of his face are prominent at the beginning of the book. But we know this is misleading, since everyone agrees that the Folio's *Titus Andronicus* is partly by George Peele, its *Timon of Athens* partly by Thomas Middleton, and its *Henry VIII* partly by John Fletcher. Two further plays, *Pericles* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, were omitted from the 1623 Folio, but are widely accepted as Shakespeare's collaborations with George Wilkins and John Fletcher respectively.

No author is named on the title pages of *The Contention of York and Lancaster* (1594) and *Richard Duke of York* (1595). This anonymity surprises modern readers, but was not unusual

at the time. For a modern analogy, consider that writers of today's Hollywood screenplays often will not get a prominent credit for their work. We usually discuss the film *Taxi Driver* as Martin Scorsese's achievement as its director rather than Paul Schrader's, as its screenwriter.

Shakespeare's name did not appear on the title pages of any of his published plays until 1598, but this should arouse no suspicion. At the start of Shakespeare career around 1588 it was simply usual for a printed play's title page to omit to identify its author, and by the end of his career around 1613 it had become usual to mention the author.

For some works published anonymously we have other external evidence of who wrote what. In 1598, Francis Meres's book *Palladis Tamia* helpfully listed Shakespeare's hits up to that point, but it makes no mention of the *Henry VI* plays nor *The Taming of the Shrew*, which we think had been publicly performed by then. Sometimes official records for theatrical performances at court or as preparation for publication name a play's author(s).

When all such external evidence is absent, we fall back on the internal evidence of the text itself in order to attribute its authorship to one or more of the plausible candidates who were alive and in the right place at the time. The challenge is to find likenesses between the text we want to attribute and the writings of the possible candidates, and these must be likenesses that can plausibly be explained only by shared authorship and not by deliberate or unconscious imitation.

First we need a 'ground truth': a set of each candidate's works that we are confident are solo efforts. We look for the likenesses between these and the work we are trying to attribute. The best evidence is the preference shown by each author for overusing some words and phrases – and avoiding others. These words and phrases must not be too distinctive, since that makes them imitable and hence they will turn up in others' writings for that reason alone. An author beginning her novel with the words, 'It is a truth universally acknowledged...' is knowingly imitating the opening of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

Literary imitation might easily throw off our attempts to identify authors by their preferred words and phrases. We would not want to mistake Shakespeare's use of Tamburlaine's phrase 'pampered jades of Asia' or his borrowing of Barabas's starlight metaphor for female beauty as evidence that Marlowe actually wrote *Henry IV Part Two* or *Romeo and Juliet*. So how, then, do we distinguish shared authorship from the conscious or unconscious borrowings of one writer from another?

Sixty years ago, two statisticians made an important discovery that improved the accuracy of authorship attribution. Working on the problem of exactly who wrote each of the so-called Federalist Papers – a series of essays by American Founding Fathers Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay – the statisticians Frederick Mosteller and David L. Wallace found that writers most strongly reveal their style in their preferences for the least interesting words.

About one word in every eighteen words of the essay you are reading is a 'the' and about one in thirty-five is an 'and'. The top one hundred most-common words account for over half of all that we say and write. With some minor variations, we all use the same hundred common words so frequently that we barely notice them. But we differ on how often we use each of them, overusing some and underusing others.

Nobody seems to be conscious of these preferences, but they are demonstrably real and persistent – scarcely changing over a lifetime – and they form an aspect of writerly style that appears to be inimitable. If we have enough writing samples and a fairly small list of candidate authors, authorship attribution questions can be answered with about eighty to ninety per cent reliability simply by counting the frequencies of these most-common words.

The New Oxford Shakespeare went a step further by also tracking authors' habits in clustering these common words. We recorded how often various authors put 'the' near to 'and', 'on' near to 'in', and so on for every possible pair of the hundred most-common words. We did this for all the words in all the plays that we are sure are by Shakespeare and likewise in all the plays by his contemporaries who have left us large enough canons to test.

It is possible to measure how well these habits reveal authorship. The trick is to leave one play out of the process of generating the profiles of preferences for each candidate, and then to treat that play as if it were a play of unknown authorship that we want to attribute. We run this test many times, leaving out a different play each time, and we count how often the method points to the man we know actually did write the play. At best, our new method reaches about ninety-four per cent accuracy in its determinations, which is currently the state of the art.

No evidence exists to contradict Adams's conjecture that Shakespeare and Marlowe actively co-wrote the plays, with (as her play mentions) further contribution from Thomas Nashe. We were able to confirm what previous investigators had suggested: that Marlowe's writing style is present in *Henry VI Parts One, Two and Three*. How did it get there? We are unable to say. Textual scholars and historians of the theatre are free to generate theories of how the scripts got written, rewritten, passed between play companies, adapted, revived, stolen and published. We may never know exactly how Marlowe's writing got into these plays, but it is undoubtedly there.

Gabriel Egan is a General Editor of the New Oxford Shakespeare Complete Works edition, and at De Montfort University he teaches and researches on computational methods for better understanding the canon of English Literature.

Kit and Will: A Timeline

- 1564 Christopher Marlowe is born in Canterbury on 26 February.
- 1564 William Shakespeare is born in Stratford-upon-Avon on 23 April.
- 1580 Marlowe is awarded a scholarship to the University of Cambridge.
- 1582 Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway.
- 1583 Will and Anne's first child, Susanna, is born.
- 1585 Their twins, Hamnet and Judith, are born.
- 1587 Marlowe receives his BA and publishes *Tamburlaine the Great*.
- 1589 *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* is first performed, cementing Marlowe's reputation as the leading playwright of the era.
- 1591 Marlowe writes *The Jew of Malta*.
- 1591 Shakespeare writes *Titus Andronicus* and *The Comedy of Errors*.
- 1591 Shakespeare and Marlowe begin to write the *Henry VI* history plays.
- 1592 Shakespeare writes *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Richard III*.
- 1592 Marlowe writes *Edward II* and *The Massacre at Paris*.
- 1593 Marlowe is murdered in Deptford, London, on 30 May.
- 1616 After writing many more plays, Shakespeare dies in Stratford-upon-Avon on 23 April.

Note: Dates for the writing, performance and publication of the plays are often in dispute; this is the timeline *this* play adopts.

Born With Teeth was first produced at the Alley Theater, Houston, Texas (Artistic Director, Rob Melrose; Managing Director, Dean R. Gladden), on 11 May 2022, with the following cast:

KIT	Matthew Amendt
WILL	Dylan Godwin
<i>Directed</i>	Rob Melrose
<i>Scenic Designer</i>	Michael Locher
<i>Costume Designer</i>	Alejo Vietti
<i>Lighting Designer</i>	Carolina Ortiz Herrera
<i>Music & Sound Designer</i>	Cliff Caruthers
<i>Stage Manager</i>	Jocelyn A. Thompson
<i>Assistant Stage Manager</i>	Rachel Dooley-Harris
<i>Staff Production Assistant</i>	Lauren Julun
<i>Fight Director</i>	Adam Noble
<i>& Intimacy Coordinator</i>	
<i>Dialect Coach</i>	Rosie Ward
<i>Assistant Director</i>	Laura Moreno
<i>Research Dramaturgs</i>	Dr Robert Shimko and Luke Evans

'Oh Jesus bless us, he is born with teeth!'
And so I was, which plainly signified
That I should snarl and bite, play the dog.

Henry VI, Part 3

Characters

WILL
KIT

Time and Place

Part One: Winter 1591
Part Two: Summer 1592
Part Three: May 1593

A private back room in a London tavern. The only needful thing is a long wooden table: their stage, their game board, their field of battle.

Note on Style and Casting

Iconoclastic, punk-edged; aggressive pacing. Historically they were twenty-seven to twenty-nine at the time. But it doesn't matter what they look like or what age they are, as long as they are roughly the same age and wildly charismatic.

Notes on the Text

A forward slash (/) indicates overlapping text.

An en dash (–) indicates a hard stop or interruption..

This text went to press before the end of rehearsals and so may differ slightly from the play as performed.

Part One

Two young men, separate, strung up in stress positions – desperate, in response to interrogation.

WILL. TALK TO SOUTHAMPTON!

KIT. TALK TO LORD BURGHELEY!

WILL. I'M HIS MAN!

KIT. I'M WORKING FOR HIM!

WILL. I'M ONLY A POET!

KIT. I'M A SERVANT OF HER MAJESTY!

WILL. I'M A LOYAL SUBJECT!

KIT. TOM KYD WAS LYING!

WILL. I AM NOT A CATHOLIC!

KIT. I AM NOT AN ATHEIST!

WILL. I AM ENGLISH!

KIT. I AM ENGLISH!

WILL. I AM –

KIT. I AM –

WILL. I AM –

KIT. I AM –

WILL. I AM –

KIT. I AM –

WILL. I AM SHAKESPEARE! KIT. I AM MARLOWE!

SLAM. Abrupt light change, sound, KIT exits, WILL goes to the table, maybe shrugging on a jacket. SLAM. Lights on WILL, no music.

WILL (*to the audience*). Yeah, that didn't happen. Not to us. It might have though. The tramp of boots in the hall, the door smashing in, the sort of thing that may come as a nasty shock but never as a surprise. It's a police state, after all. Totalitarian, rotten through with agents sniffing and snapping at their own people – the Queen's an old monster scapegoating Catholics to distract the people from dragged-out wars and bad harvests.

Well, be fair, lots of Catholics do want to kill her. Assassination plots from here and abroad are real enough; it was only thirty-odd years ago we had the religion whiplash, Protestant–Catholic–Protestant faster than you could keep up with and nobody knows when it'll happen again. So where does that leave us? Jumpy as cats, that's what.

So there it is, she's invented the secret service. We've got more spies than there are crimes to spy out – and someone has to pay. The nobles have some rights but we don't; we aren't citizens, we're subjects. Subjected to all sorts of let's call it unpleasantness. Poets have big mouths, like it or not we're exposed, we've all got targets on our backs. But I survive, I get away with it, I get to die in my bed.

Pause.

Not everyone manages that.

SLAM. Lights change, sound. WILL is at the table writing, consulting the books, shabbily dressed. KIT bursts in, beautifully dressed maybe in black with gold buttons, maybe a little lit up.

KIT. Starting without me?

WILL. Oh, hello, I'm – I'm just making some notes from *Holinshed's Chronicles*.

KIT. Holinshed? And what's that, Hall?

WILL. Oh, they – they're the most reliable sources, I believe.

KIT. Sources? *Sources*? Are we to take dictation from historians?

WILL. It... *is* a history play.

KIT. All the more reason to use our imaginations. History may be written by the victors, but *we* know they delegate to the poets.

WILL. Oh, that – that's nicely put.

KIT. Yes. Of course we'll *start* with the facts but mind you, we will take *all* the liberties or the play will be as long as the wars and nearly as deadly.

WILL. Yes, of course. My thoughts exactly. It's theatre, not a history lesson. As long as –

KIT. Exactly! Anyone fussed about mere *events* out of order or someone coming into it who won't have been born for ten years can get fucked and probably needs to be.

WILL. Ha! Absolutely.

Slight pause.

I *would* like to say, if I may. It's, um, it's an honour to work with you.

KIT. I should say so.

WILL. When Lord Strange suggested we work together, when he said you *offered* to, I couldn't believe it, to be honest. Why should you, the legendary poet of the great *Tamburlaine*, throw your lot in with me –

KIT. The hack writer of a derivative bloodfest?

Slight pause.

WILL. Well, I mean, I know it wasn't very – but –

KIT. No. But you have been noticed. Rumours abound. There may just be something to you.

WILL. Oh, really? I mean, coming from you...

KIT. From me?

WILL. Well, to be honest, you're the reason I wanted to write.

Your work, your verse, it *dazzled* me. And now I've properly met you in the flesh...

KIT. Oh, does my flesh dazzle you?

Slight pause.

WILL. A bit.

A look, a moment, before KIT breaks the mood.

KIT. I must say I like your enthusiasm. I've just written three more plays, you can't imagine the cramps, I can use a scribe – half the money for a quarter of the work is what I'm counting on, so you'd better keep those fingers limber. MISTRESS PLUMLEY!

WILL. Oh! What –

KIT. MISTRESS PLUMLEY, A POT OF STRONG ALE IF YOU PLEASE!

WILL. Oh, but we have –

KIT. What ails the hag that she comes not running?

WILL. We've small beer, just there.

KIT. Did I ask for small beer?

WILL. No but –

KIT. Is there anything small or beer-ish about me?

WILL. I wouldn't know but –

KIT. MISTRESS PLUMLEY –

WILL. I told her not to come.

KIT. What?

WILL. We've hired the room for privacy. To, to work. I told her to leave us entirely alone.

KIT. What, all alone? No service? Not one pliant bottle-boy running to and fro?

WILL. Well, we *are* here to –

KIT. To work, right. I see you're familiar with my reputation.

WILL. Lord Strange wants the play up by next month, and sequels if it goes well. Which of course, I mean, no doubt –

KIT. All right, all right. What an obedient schoolboy it is.

WILL. I'd like to get paid.

KIT. What, panting after royalties? Haven't you got a patron?

WILL. I don't like to always be begging for money.

KIT. I find I don't have to beg. I render services that are quite promptly rewarded. No, not *that*. Did you think I meant country matters? You would. Get your mind out of the stud yard for a moment and listen. Feckless little Southampton is no sort of patron for a likely lad like you, you need someone who can make use of a quick quill. Poets get around, they see things, they hear things; there are those that find that useful. Or do you think you're above that sort of work?

WILL. You haven't said what sort of work you're talking about.

KIT. If I have to say, you're too stupid for it. My fellow won't pay up for that. Come on, you're no mooncalf, you've got your eyes open.

WILL. Am I – am I being recruited?

KIT. Recruited? Jesu, listen to it preen; don't get above yourself, glover's boy.

WILL. Wasn't your father a shoemaker?

KIT. And yet I was clever enough to get a scholarship to uni, and a good deal more. Whereas you staggered out of the shop into – what was it, oh that's right – *acting*. Your family must be *beside* themselves.

WILL. It's honest work while I –

KIT. Well if you call baited bears and whores honest but I think that may be stretching a point.

WILL. I just want to write.

KIT. Who doesn't, but not enough money in the theatre, not nearly, and even if you can write straight poetry – *can* you I wonder – you'll only be hand-to-mouth.

WILL. As opposed to hand-to...?

Gesture of wanking someone off.

KIT. Ha, what scorn! Haven't you heard, we must live by our wits or die with empty bellies.

WILL. Perhaps I'd rather an empty belly than a stuck one.

KIT. What, do you fear a dagger?

WILL. I'm not a fighting man. Nor treacherous.

KIT. Treacherous?

WILL. I fancy the work you're talking of requires disguise. Counterfeiting, equivocation, betrayal.

KIT. And all that's too mucky for our bare-faced Will? No disguises for you? I wonder. Just exactly who you seem, is that it? An open book?

WILL. You don't know me. Could we work, do you think, or is that a radical suggestion?

Pause. A bit of a stand-off. Then:

KIT. Right, let's divvy the bits. I've read Holinshed too *and* Hall, I've got the gist. Poor old Nashe did Act One already and ghastrly as it is we may as well save time and keep it.

WILL. What happened to Nashe, anyway?

KIT. I don't know, the clap probably and too good for him, the hack.

WILL. I thought you were friends.

KIT. Dear friends, that's why I only call him a hack.

WILL. Well, Strange won't pay for us to start over but I do think it's too bad.

KIT. Right? (*Mocking:*) 'Comets, importing change of times and states!'

WILL. 'Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky!'

KIT. 'And with them scourge the bad revolting stars' – bad revolting is right. Well but there it is, we're stuck with it, we'll take it from Act Two. I'll take the Countess, and the Bastard, oh and Plantagenet of course –

WILL. Have I mentioned I'm writing this with you?

KIT. You can have the hero Talbot, he's far too roast beef for me, see what you can make of him.

WILL. And his son...

KIT. If you say so.

WILL. I was thinking, their death scene could be absolutely heartbreaking.

KIT has picked up a page WILL had been making notes on before he came in.

KIT. What's this? An outline?

WILL. Just some ideas, I don't mean to –

KIT. No, no, this is good. Very good. Oh, I see, yes, nicely done.

WILL. Oh, I'm glad you think so, I –

KIT has picked up a quill and started crossing things out and drawing lines to move things around, or tearing off bits of the paper.

KIT. Yes but no, we don't need that –

WILL. Oh –

KIT. That's all right but it needs to go there –

WILL. Oh, but I think –

KIT. And here – we've got to have something to break up the battles, you know, it can't all be gore and sentiment.

WILL. Oh, but –

KIT. And I have *such* plans for Joan.

WILL. Oh, Joan of Arc? I thought I might –

KIT. What, La Pucelle? No. Joan is mine. Speaking of treachery. That treacherous whore of a phony witch – it'll be hilarious, right up to when we burn her.

WILL. Hilarious?

KIT. Black comedy.

WILL. Oh yes, I see, but don't you think – I mean – I think there's an opportunity there. A brave God-touched girl, dressed as a man for safety's sake, leading an army, dying for her honour and her country. A tragic figure.

KIT. Tragic? She's not a hero, she's fucking French! The enemy. Who the audience hates. Not to mention Catholic. If you've forgotten Bloody Mary I can tell you no one else has; fanatics are *not* in fashion.

WILL. Oh yes right, of course, that's right. Oh but –

KIT. 'Brave God-touched girl' – brave whore, running around in trousers, fucking her way to the top, getting good Englishmen killed – oh, the cheers when we light the torch! You've got to have a sense of the theatrical, boy.

WILL. We're the same age, you know.

KIT. Not in stage years. Christ, I'd like a real drink.

WILL. I know the begetter of 'is this the face that launched a thousand ships' does not write drunk.

KIT. Do you imagine this will be a deathless work of genius in the rank of *Doctor Faustus* or anything else that has flowed from my throbbing quill? Dream on. *This* I could write sotted to unconsciousness.

WILL. We haven't even started, how do you know what –

KIT. Well, when you yoke an Arabian steed to a mule, you don't plough a field that anything will grow in.

WILL. Right, first of all, you don't think much of yourself, do you? Arabian steed? Try an ass in motley.

KIT. Now, now –

WILL. Second, I will undertake to plough a field to grow *wonders* in, if you will only bend to the work and let me!

KIT. Did you call me an ass in motley?

WILL. Well, I, I did. Well, why did you consent in the first place if I'm so beneath you?

KIT. I have my reasons and while they may concern you, I do not choose that you shall know them.

Pause.

WILL. I'm not here to quarrel with you.

KIT. That's really not up to you, at the best of times.

Slight pause.

WILL. I'm going to get started on Talbot's entrance.

He picks up a quill. KIT strolls to the other end of the table and does the same.

KIT. Right. Come to me, ma putain française.

Starts to write but almost instantly:

Who do you fuck, boys or girls?

WILL. I – what – how is that –

KIT. Oh, both? Equivocator! Well, I do see your point, a hole's a hole when all's said and the candle's out.

WILL. That is not *at all* what I –

KIT. Of course that's not the legal point of view but only *poor* buggers hang for it.

WILL. I'm quite sure I can get this play written before I'm hanged for sodomy; may I trust you for the same?

KIT. Oh, fear me not for that, I am all discretion. On a fine day. When the wind is southerly.

They start to write again but almost instantly:

The worst of this French whore is her whore religion. When you're on your knees to the Pope all the time it gets you in the habit. Don't you think?

WILL. I wouldn't know.

KIT. No? I should think you'd know enough to hazard an opinion.

WILL. Are you asking me if I think Catholics are whores?

Slight pause.

Or if I'm a Catholic?

Pause. A dangerous question.

KIT. Christ, no, I'm sure you're of the Queen's faith, like any sensible man. Hardly anything more dangerous than a Catholic, and young Will is not a dangerous man. Are you?

Pause.

WILL. I am not.

Pause.

KIT. All right. Stop distracting me, you temptress, I've got work to do if you haven't.

Quills scratching for a moment.

Is Winchester a bishop or a cardinal?

WILL. Look it up!

KIT. Easier to ask you.

WILL. Cardinal.

KIT. I thought bishop.

WILL. Why'd you ask then? But it's cardinal.

KIT. Bishop's better. Pop of the 'B' pop of the 'P' two choppy syllables, *Bishop*.

WILL. Cardinal's more sinister. *Car-dinal Win-chester*. Anyway he *was* a cardinal, look it up.

KIT. No one cares.

WILL. You care or you wouldn't be arguing.

KIT. You think I'm arguing? I'm not even sharpening my teeth on you yet.

WILL. I think you were born with teeth.

KIT (*liking the phrase*). Oh?

WILL. I'm using that.

KIT. I'm using that.

KIT. We'll see.

Quills scratching for a moment but almost at once:

If you're not a Catholic why don't you want to do some of the Queen's work on the sly? Or even if you *are* it's the best cover, if you think about it.

WILL *gets up and looks into the hall*.

Hunting rats?

WILL. Please shut up.

Maybe he crosses to the window and looks out of it too, before turning back to KIT.

Is this how you spy? Just come right out and ask people things?

KIT. You'd be surprised how often that works.

WILL. I wouldn't be at all surprised if people tell you all their secrets out of sheer exasperation.

KIT. What are your secrets then, darling?

WILL. I just want to write!

KIT. Oh come on, no one is that simple, not even you.

WILL. How is that being simple?

KIT. Because no one gets to *just write*. You're *saying* things.

WILL. Nothing that can be used against me. It's Ancient Rome, it's picturesque Ephesus; blank verse and entertainment, here and gone like heat lightning.

KIT. We give ourselves away in every line.

WILL. Maybe you do, no one is studying me.

KIT. You are *so* much stupider than you look, and how is *that* possible?

WILL. What?

KIT. They will see what they want to see. And if you're not in with them, they will see subversion.

WILL. There's no reason for them to look, I keep my head down, don't I, I don't draw attention, I go to church and pay my tithes. Why should I even be visible?

KIT. You remind me of the uses of a university education.

WILL. Stop scoffing at me for that, I got a perfectly good education, Latin, Greek and Rhetoric, more than enough to work with, I won't be condescended to because I didn't waste years getting drunk with titled undergraduates.

KIT. Latin, Greek and Rhetoric, *Christ*, you miss the point. What you learn from books is the least of it; at university you learn politics. You learn how the world works, rubbing up against the sons of power – and of course yes I do mean rubbing up literally but not only that – oh, it's impossible to explain to a naif like you. Yes, you're clever, yes you work hard, yes you're doing well enough. It'll get you nowhere if you don't know *people*. It'll get you worse than nowhere, it'll get you somewhere you *don't* want to be.

WILL. I honestly don't know what's happening. Are you recruiting me, spying on me, or warning me?

KIT. Well I came in to do one thing but I'm improvising. There's something about you... I think you're bringing out the mother hen in me.

WILL. If there's anything as soft as a hen's feather about you I'd be very much surprised.

KIT. Well, you're right there, generally speaking. Less of a hen than a cock.

WILL. And now you're what, seducing me?

KIT. Not my type, far too old.

WILL. Again, we are exactly the same age.

KIT. Quite.

KIT gets sexy up on him. WILL is into it.

WILL. Oh... Kit...

KIT. Mmm. Did I say you could call me Kit?

WILL. I feel we're on that footing. Will you call me Will?

KIT. Christ, you're the sort to pun on your own name, aren't you? Well, I will if you will. Why do you stop?

WILL. I think it would be like petting a leopard. Lovely for a moment, until the teeth flash out.

KIT. What a compliment. Do you really think I'd bite you?

WILL. I think you would devour me.

KIT. Mm.

WILL. No. No, look, yes, it's true, I *am* dazzled and I cannot believe I'm saying this but I truly do need to write this bloody play and get paid so I can *eat* not to mention pay my landlord so for the love of God may we please *work*?

Slight pause.

KIT. Such a fuss! You only had to say so.

He sits down and starts writing. WILL goes back to the other end of the table and does the same. KIT gets back up and comes around to look at what WILL's writing.

WILL. What now?

KIT. Just seeing where the transition will be. Why do you have Talbot call Joan virtuous? 'I muse we meet not with the

Dauphin's grace, his new-found champion virtuous Joan of Arc? Grace, champion, virtuous – what did I tell you about that bitch?

WILL. It's Talbot's point of view, a noble mind sees nobility.

KIT. That's not it, you're putting your thumb on the scale, you think I'll be swayed by your noble vision.

WILL. I doubt I could sway you to pick up a pin! We'll have it your way, of course.

KIT. You know, it takes the wind right out of my sails when you are so biddable. Is that how you manage, give in and give way?

WILL. Reeds that bend survive the storm that cracks the oak.

KIT. I'm no oak.

WILL. No, you're the storm, you're the wildfire that consumes the woods and then itself, leaving but a rumour of smoke.

KIT. Now, see, you say you want to work but then you flirt like *that*.

WILL. I'm not flirting.

KIT. You are, even if you don't know it. Christ, what am I going to do.

WILL. What –

KIT. I'll give them someone else. Tom's been unbearable ever since his *Spanish Tragedy* was such a hit. And he's been snooping in his own clumsy way.

WILL. Wait, what – give them – give who?

KIT. Don't be thick, do I really need to draw you a picture?
Right –

He scrawls a big downward-facing triangle on a sheet and holds it up.

Behold: the Infernal Triangle.

Pointing to one end of the top line:

There's Essex, you've heard of him, I take it?

WILL. The Queen's favorite.

KIT. And the head of one faction of the secret machine, as you might call it. The state apparatus, the web our glorious Queen squats in like a great cob.

Pointing to the other end of the top line:

And there's Robert Cecil, head of the other faction. On the same side you'd think, but they hate each other like poison, maybe literally someday. I'm Cecil's man.

WILL. So does that mean Lord Essex is your enemy?

KIT. Oh, he'd laugh, his enemy? He scarcely knows I exist.

WILL. I doubt that. Anyway, then, who's the bottom point? Of the triangle?

KIT. Oh, that's Raleigh. Just a friend of mine. But Essex hates him too. Essex is a very good hater, why the Queen loves him so.

WILL. Wait, Raleigh? Sir Walter Raleigh? You're in fast waters.

KIT. I can swim.

WILL. But he's a dangerous friend to have, isn't he? I've heard...

KIT. I'm sure you have. And Essex would love to prove it. But Raleigh has his wits about him.

WILL. Yes but – I don't think I follow –

KIT. Never mind, I won't quiz you on it – the point is, I can afford dangerous friends, because Cecil protects me. But he doesn't do it for love.

WILL. So, when you say you'll give them Tom – oh but you wouldn't – you won't – Tom's one of us.

KIT. All the handier. I'll do what I have to. Trust me for that and nothing else.

WILL. I do trust you.

KIT. What did I just say? If you had any sense you'd run a mile.

WILL. Oh God, please don't tell me any more. I just want / to write –

KIT. To write, oh, you fool. When you're grinning at me from a spike on London Bridge I'll doff my hat and murmur I warned you.

WILL. I'll never be grand enough for a spike.

KIT. No, that's true. You'll just disappear.

WILL. There is nothing here. I swear. I am a blameless loyal subject and the son of blameless loyal subjects. I would be an empty wineskin to the Queen's men.

KIT. You'd be surprised what they can squeeze from an empty wineskin. Though it won't be wine that puddles.

Pause.

Well, let's finish Act Two so we can get drunk. Race you?

WILL. No but, Kit –

KIT. We'd better get it done quickly, I'll have to go out of town soon. Business abroad, you know how it is. If there's a sequel we may have to work separately which I know you'd prefer.

WILL. No but, Kit, are you going to –

KIT. You're either in or out, Will. If you're out, you don't get to know. Content yourself.

Pause.

WILL. I do. I will.

SLAM. Light/sound/transition. KIT goes out; WILL in a spot, maybe sheds his jacket, talking to the audience.

Part Two

WILL. Yeah, I'm no secret Catholic but my family are, so that's a problem... Do you think he really agreed to write with me to spy on me? Maybe he thought I was stupid enough to tell him anything. Well, I wasn't, quite, but unfortunately that misbegotten history play we threw together did well enough that we've got to write sequels, God help us. So here I am, back in the lion's den.

SLAM. WILL is alone writing steadily at the table. It's hot; maybe he's in a not-very-clean shirt. KIT bangs in; underneath his banter he's tense.

KIT. Hello, darling, I'm back.

WILL holds up a finger to say 'quiet', give me a minute without looking up or stopping writing.

What's this impertinence? Too busy to welcome back the conquering hero –

WILL holds up his whole hand and hunches over his work, determined not to be distracted.

Fine, fine, finish your deathless whatever. Feck, it's hot.

He does something to distract WILL, though WILL refuses to look up. Finally –

For the love of our whoreson Christ, I've been gone for months, can you leave off posing as a fucking genius for ten minutes?

WILL. Posing?

KIT snatches up the page and reads what WILL's just written.

KIT.

'I fear me, love, if that I had died
thou wouldst not have mourned so much for me.
No, my love, I should not mourn, but *die* for thee.'

(*Displeased; it's good.*) Not bad.

WILL. I know. You should have heard the next line, which has
now gone right out of my head.

KIT. The next thing you think of will be better. Well. Look at
you. Stealing a march, are you?

WILL. I told you I was doing Margaret.

KIT. You didn't tell me you were doing her better than anything
else we've written so far in this shit play.

WILL. It's not so bad.

KIT. It's a shit play and you know it. A dog's breakfast, a mare's
nest, a... nother bit of colourful vernacular.

WILL. It'll play.

KIT. Oh yes, it'll play. Not the stuff of immortality, though, is it.
'Why droopeth my lord, like overripened corn?' Why do you
think, dozy cow.

WILL. I'm sorry if I've held you back. You needn't worry
though, you've already got your immortality sewn up.

KIT. You haven't, though. Have you? You've got what, that
clown show you ripped off from Plautus? And *Titus I-vomit-*
thus?

WILL. That's – that's a *pun*.

KIT. Oh, I know, I should leave the low humour to you, you're
the expert at giving the groundlings what they like.

WILL. Well, and what's wrong with that? And you know very
well I've done more than those now –

KIT. Oh yes, that ridiculous *Shrew*; if you pandered any
harder to the crowd you'd be on your knees undoing their
breeches –

WILL. Just because you can't write comedy to save your soul –

KIT. Can't? Or would not stoop to?

WILL. And there are those who compared my *Richard*
favorably to *Tamburlaine* –

KIT. Ha, I wouldn't boast about slavish imitation, or did you
think I wouldn't notice you hastening to write your own
monstrous king and might I add failing? (*Mockingly.*)
'A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!' Please.
Accidental comedy is surely *not* what you were aiming at.

WILL. No, I was aiming at actual human beings and not
motiveless cruelty dressed up in your mighty lines like
whores in borrowed robes –

KIT *strikes him*. WILL *is knocked back*. KIT *is braced for*
a return attack, but WILL is stunned, and then bursts out:

What the – what the bloody hell are you playing at? *No* I'm
not going to *fight* you, I'm just trying to work and you're
provoking me for God knows why and I'm not having it!
(*Maybe grabbing books as though to leave.*) You may enjoy
pointless brawls but – no, that is it!

KIT. Will –

WILL. No, no, that's it, I am *done*, I am not –

KIT. Calm down, Christ, I didn't mean it, I was just –

WILL. Well, that's you all over, isn't it, 'didn't mean it', what
did you mean then –

KIT. All right, all right –

WILL. And oh – (*Feels his nose starting to bleed.*) you damned
fool, I can't get blood on this, it's my only decent shirt!

KIT (*giving him a handkerchief*). Here, have this. It's all *right*, I
was just – never mind, only don't go.

WILL. Well, I don't really mean to go, only stop being such
a madman.

KIT. *I'm the madman?* I never met anyone so improbable; what would it take to provoke you to violence?

WILL. You'll know when you do. Why were you picking a fight, anyway? (*Reads embroidered initials on the handkerchief.*) 'R.C.'?

KIT. Just another whore.

WILL. A wealthy whore, to have such fine linen.

KIT. What are you implying?

WILL. That of you and 'R.C.', I fancy 'R.C.' is not the whore. What's funny?

KIT. Only your face in a minute when you realise.

WILL. 'R.C.' ... Oh Christ, Robert Cecil?

Maybe he runs to see that no one's listening at the door while KIT laughs.

KIT. Need a clean pair of pants?

WILL. Oh shut up, you know I didn't know.

KIT. Anyway, you were right, but at least I'm not a cheap whore. Though I suppose you'd say better poor and free than rich and had.

WILL. I suppose I would.

KIT. It won't do, you know. Every man must have a master. Anyone who thinks otherwise is living in a dream.

WILL. Perhaps I like my dream. Anyway, what about a mistress?

KIT. Oh, I know you're a romantic but I'd like to see you groan under the rule of woman.

WILL. But I do. The Queen for one.

KIT. Your wife, for another?

Slight pause.

I do know you've a wife, back home. Why so shut-mouth? Is she ugly? Old? Beastly?

WILL. I don't want to talk about her.

KIT. Oh, no, oh poor Will, have you got her upon a monument, like an image of virtue? You ought to know, she opens her legs like any other woman –

WILL *hits him*. KIT *staggers back*. *He crows and squares off for a fight.*

Ah-ha! Now we know what it takes. Come on then!

WILL (*handing back handkerchief*). Sorry. Here, have this back.

KIT. Oh, damn, are we done? A married man should have more stamina.

WILL. As a matter of fact I do love her. There are different sorts of love.

KIT. Oh yes, I know. Love in a stable. Love in an alley. Love against the wall. Love over a table. Love with a pretty boy. Love with a slutty girl. Love with a nobleman whose purse you plunder.

WILL. I'm not sure you know what love is.

KIT. Oh shut up. Listen to you bleating on / about love –

WILL. You're the one who's going / on about it –

KIT. When I'm the one who knows how truly fucking dangerous it is.

WILL. If you could do *anything* quietly you'd find you could do anything you like.

KIT. No, no, that's you, slipping through the world like an eel, playing it safe, Careful Will who won't. But I will.

WILL. I know you will.

KIT. Can we stop doing that?

WILL. Right, yeah, I'm cautious, I have to be bloody cautious, because yes I've got a wife, *and* children, and I'd rather not see them starve in the next bad year – I can't afford reckless youth, I've got to keep my head down, stay out of trouble and make some bloody money.

KIT. Reckless youth? I've been out in the world as you *never* have, serving our country –

WILL. As if you've ever served anything or anyone but yourself, your ambition, your greedy appetite for sensation, your wild quarrelsome vainglorious –

KIT. Oh, is that how you see me?

WILL. It's impossible to insult you, you lap it all up like cream.

KIT. Yes I do, would you like that?

WILL. No. Work?

KIT. Did you miss me at all?

WILL. I didn't miss the uproar, the chaos, the impossibility of knowing whether knowing you would get me killed or that you'd kill me yourself –

KIT. Ah, you did miss me.

WILL. I'm amazed you made it *back* alive, after what I've heard.

KIT. What, are you spying on *me*?

WILL. Spying, it doesn't take spying, try *not* knowing what Kit Marlowe is doing, if only I could *avoid* hearing about it at every pub and street corner! Arrested for coining in Flushing, arrested for brawling with constables of all things in Shoreditch, in and out of trouble wherever you go!

KIT. Those constables were begging for it.

WILL. But this is what I wonder about. It's pretty easy to see how you get *into* trouble. The interesting thing is how you get out again, quick as a cat. No jail can hold you, it seems.

KIT. Well, now you're asking the right question.

WILL. But I don't want the answer. We do need to finish this thing, have you got the rebellion scenes?

KIT pulls some weather-stained pages out of his jacket or boot and throws them down. WILL picks them up and reads aloud.

'My father was a Mortimer, my mother a Plantagenet, my wife descended of the Lacies, therefore am I of an honourable house. Valiant I am, I am able to endure much, I fear neither sword nor fire. Be brave, then; for your captain is brave, and vows reformation. I will make it felony to drink small beer –

He breaks off and gives KIT a look. KIT shrugs or smirks. WILL continues.

All the realm shall be in common; and when I am king, as king I will be' – God save us, are you mad?

KIT. What?

WILL. What did you tell me when we first started last year, that my head would be on a spike?

KIT. Yes?

WILL. We'll be neighbours.

KIT. My point as you know very well was that you need protection, you need connections, then you can do as you like.

WILL. You can't glorify treason!

KIT. It's history, I'm not making it up.

WILL. Jack Cade wasn't setting up against the *king*, he was rebelling against Suffolk on the *side* of the king, it's in Hollinshed –

KIT. *Damn* Hollinshed –

WILL. You've got him as a glamorous valiant hero with noble ancestors and a claim to the *throne* –

KIT. Oh come on, he's a villain and an imposter and he knows it, he's putting it on, and he'll be killed before the end.

WILL. The censors will never never pass it, he's too charismatic by half, I don't care what you say, the groundlings will be cheering him on, we may as well call it *The Bloody Tragedy of Jack Cade*.

KIT. The censors will pass it if they're paid enough.

WILL. God help us if they do! No. No, I know, look, easy fix.

KIT. Who says it needs fixing?

WILL. No, look, you read Cade's lines, and I'll be one of his followers, I'll be Dick the Butcher. Go on, start. Just go, let me show you.

KIT *begins to read the part of Jack Cade*.

KIT. My father was a Mortimer –

WILL *interjects, as though in a mocking aside to the audience, in a working-class accent*.

WILL. An honest man and a good bricklayer.

KIT. My mother a Plantagenet –

WILL. I knew her well; she was a midwife.

KIT. My wife descended of the Lacies –

WILL. She was, indeed, a pedlar's daughter, and sold many laces.

KIT. Therefore am I of an honourable house.

WILL. Ay, by my faith, the field is honourable, and there was he borne, under a hedge.

KIT. Valiant I am –

WILL. For beggary is valiant.

KIT. I am able to endure much –

WILL. No question of that, for I have seen him whipped three market-days together.

KIT. I fear neither sword nor fire –

WILL. But methinks he should stand in fear of fire, being burnt in the hand for stealing of sheep.

KIT. All right! I get it.

WILL. There.

KIT. And I hate it.

WILL. It'll work, we undercut and make the audience laugh at him, then we can't be accused of –

KIT. I don't care, I hate it! Jack Cade is a magnificent monster and you want to turn him into a clown show.

WILL. I don't give a damn for your magnificent monster – maybe you're right, maybe you can get away with anything, it certainly seems so, but I just want to get by, I just want to survive.

KIT. You won't.

WILL. What do you mean?

KIT. It doesn't matter, nothing matters, I'm off to get drunk, don't wait up.

WILL. What, stop, wait –

KIT. I can't stop, I can't wait, you don't know anything, there's a great big clock ticking you know nothing about –

WILL. Well, tell me –

KIT. Do you have any idea how many men I've betrayed? It's easy as breathing, it's him or me and that's not a hard choice; it's my profession, it's how the world works and I'd rather be one of the men winding it up than being wound –

WILL. I'm completely lost –

KIT. You are! And you don't know it! They want fresh venison and you are bleeding.

WILL. Ah. But am I bleeding?

KIT. You're bleeding if I say you are.

WILL. And have you said?

KIT. Not yet.

WILL. Don't.

KIT. That simple?

WILL. Look, I know you think I'm a blinking idiot but I'm not blind. I feel like a coney in a trap, twisting and turning as the poacher approaches. Can the rabbit beg the man to free him? Because I will beg, if it will boot me anything. Please. For the sake of my family.

KIT. That means nothing to me.

WILL. For the sake of the words then. Isn't that something you care about? For the sake of all the words I've yet to write.

KIT. Oh, poor Will.

WILL. What?

KIT. You'll never be anything but a minor talent, you're in among the Greenes and Nashes and Fletchers.

WILL (*he thinks Fletcher is terrific*). Oh I think Fletcher is –

KIT. I am the greatest poet of our age. Do you deny it?

WILL. I don't. I can't.

KIT. Well. There. If it's you or me then?

WILL. Still, I can't help but feel...

KIT. The instinct of an animal. Can't blame you for not thinking beyond that. But if the poacher must live, the coney must go into the pot.

Pause.

Look, the fact is I'm on thin ice, to muddle the metaphor. The coining, that was all right, that was part of the game, my arrest was just cover. But Shoreditch... they're not pleased. I've got to give them something. They've their eye on your

people, your father fined for not going to church, that looks bad, and then there's the little matter of the Jesuit pamphlet in the rafters they think no one knows about.

WILL. No one *could* know, how could you – But that's *nothing* – you – I read your *Edward the Second* while you were away – how can you get away with *that*?? A whole *play* about a king's *boyfriend*?

KIT. Well, that's just it. Whatever I do, it doesn't matter. I have powerful friends. And you. You are an actor.

WILL. Oh, God.

KIT. Oh, poor Will. You're going about this all wrong.

WILL. Is there a right way to go about it?

KIT. Well, not by grovelling and not as a *poet*. I don't give a damn for your family or your future. If you want me to save you, give me something I do care about.

WILL. How many times do I have to say no?

KIT. I'm not all that accustomed to hearing that word.

WILL. That's clear enough.

KIT. And *in fact* you flirt like a spado punk.

WILL. I bloody well do not – well all right I can't seem to help myself with you. But I can't afford to be consumed.

KIT. Consumed. Leopards again? Or that wildfire?

WILL. Both, all; if I ask you, will you not burn me to ashes and cinders?

KIT. If you ask *very* nicely.

WILL. Christ's wounds, what do you take me for?

KIT. Your mind always goes there, doesn't it?

WILL. Isn't that what you mean?

KIT. Of course it is, but...

WILL. What? I've never seen you struggle for a word before.

KIT. You're the romantic, aren't you? Don't you get it?

Pause. Then WILL laughs.

WILL. Is there anything you won't try?

KIT. Well, now you're hurting my feelings.

WILL. If you were half the spy the world thinks you are, we'd all be as unsafe as oysters in December. Love, is it? How gullible do you think I am?

KIT. All right, have it your way.

WILL shoves him back right onto the table, jumps up and straddles him, and kisses him. KIT goes for it. WILL sits back up.

WILL. Well. That didn't prove anything either way.

KIT. Did you think it would?

WILL. If you'd stopped me it would have proved you were playing me, or trying to.

KIT. But I didn't stop you.

WILL. No, but that proves nothing. You might be strangely, unaccountably sincere in your affection –

KIT. You really don't give yourself enough credit.

WILL. Or you might be what I already knew you for, an opportunistic slut. *Oof!*

KIT has shoved him violently off him and onto the floor; he stands up on the table in a fury.

KIT. You say you're not a fighting man and you absolutely dare me to draw metal! Christ's bleeding holes, do you take me for a man without feelings, for a small petty man, a man for hire, for a worm, for a snake, for a low crawling thing, for a cheap whore, for a cheap anything?

WILL. Never, God knows you'll cost me dear enough.

KIT. I am Jove's messenger, swift god of eloquence –

WILL. And treachery, don't forget treachery –

KIT. I am Mercury, scourge of God; defy me and be sorry!

WILL. I'm already sorry.

KIT (*dropping out of the rage*). Liar; you love it.

WILL. I never know where I am with you. Mercury, I can well believe it, mercurial and mad.

KIT. Look. *You kissed me.*

WILL. Yes?

KIT. Well, one thing we know about you is, you are *not* an opportunistic slut. You are sincerity itself. You couldn't tell a lie to save your soul.

WILL. You might be surprised.

KIT. That kiss was the truth.

WILL. Oh – I don't know about that –

KIT. Will.

WILL. I mean –

KIT. WILL.

WILL. What.

KIT. You leapt upon me like a starving man on a haunch of beef.

WILL. I shouldn't have. I'm sorry.

KIT. You're not.

WILL. Are you?

KIT. What do you think?

WILL. I think nothing, you snatch my thoughts in the nest and shatter them in a careless grip.

KIT. Is that an egg metaphor?

WILL. Yes, wasn't that clear?

KIT. But my grip is anything but careless, I only shatter what I mean to.

WILL. Now who doesn't know himself?

KIT. I beg your / pardon –

WILL. You are a very genius of carelessness, you throw your *life* into the hazard for the pleasure of a clever remark. How is it that I, before I even met you, knew your reputation?

KIT. Not much reason for discretion among our sort, is there? No one's shocked by what anyone gets up to in prickish pursuits.

WILL. Not that.

Both quiet, tense, knowing the danger of this conversation.

KIT. What then?

WILL. How is it anyone may hear of Marlowe's blasphemy? When you know that is the next thing to treason? How can you be so careless as to let yourself be known –

KIT. As one who declares himself an enemy of God?

WILL. Oh God. Be careful.

WILL checks the door again, to be sure no one can hear. They look at each other again.

KIT. Reputation is a virulent weed. It may grow up out of nothing, out of the stoniest ground, and creep itself around any handy object.

WILL. Are you saying you're not...?

KIT. Atheist. A word newly invented as a stick to beat us with, those of us who use the wits our absent God gave us to think for ourselves. A. Theist. You're our Greek scholar, what's that mean?

WILL. Without God.

KIT. And yet that's what they call everyone not strict Church of England. No God but their God. Catholics too, as you must be keenly aware.

WILL. How many times –

KIT. Right, you're not; all right if you say so. I admit, in all the time we've spent together, I've never seen you betray any signs of slavish devotion to the Pope. Or to anything, really, except your deplorable work ethic.

WILL. I have a very good work ethic.

KIT. That's what I mean by deplorable. The point is, if you believe in anything, one wouldn't know it. Is it your secretive nature? Or are you in truth as hollow as a gourd?

WILL. That is the difference between us, I think. You expose yourself with every breath, with every line, to read you is to know you with glittering specificity, I knew you before we'd even met.

KIT. You know less than you think.

WILL. I want to disappear. I want to be invisible. I want to write about kings and villains and love and war and life and be as unknowable at the end of it all as I was before I wrote a word. I want to hide in my work like an outlaw in the forest – hunt as you might, you won't find as much as a potshard left behind.

KIT. And that's it. Who but an outlaw need be so sly? Who but someone with desperate crimes to hide?

WILL. It's my nature.

KIT. Or is it your necessity?

WILL. Do you really want to know?

This conversation has become far more intimate than any they've had before.

KIT. Are you about to confess?

WILL. No, no, or not my religion, such as it may be. That's only ritual and scaffolding, the architecture of faith, not faith itself.

KIT. And what is that faith itself? What do you believe, sly boy?

WILL. I believe... in nothing certain.

KIT. Ah, you cheat.

WILL. No. No, this is at the heart of me, if you really want to know.

KIT. I do.

WILL. Then, I believe... that the meaning in our human world is a lucid mystery, full of light, ungraspable. That there is more in heaven and earth than we can *dream* of. And that ineffability gives me a strange comfort. If I can understand God, with my poor understanding, then He cannot be very great. I *need* Him to be greater than I can know.

KIT. Ineffable. There's nothing I can't eff.

WILL. I don't doubt it.

KIT. Still that is... not what I expected. I like 'architecture of faith'. But it's too grand. Religion's a slum, a foul wasteland of patched-up falling-down shacks they call a palace.

WILL. Is that the sort of talk you get at Sir Walter Raleigh's?

KIT. It's the sort of talk I *give*. Why, what do you know about what goes on there?

WILL. It's rumoured, he and his friends are engaged in the occult, in strange philosophies. They call it the School of Night.

KIT. They do?

WILL. Well, I do.

KIT. Rather a good phrase.

WILL. I thought so.

KIT. Well, I don't need any school to tell me what to think. I don't *deny* God, I just don't like him very much. It's all cant and hypocrisy, our church, nothing more sacred than a pack of old men and one old woman's lust for power. Am

I to prostrate myself before *that*? No, if they are God's voice I have nothing to say to God.

WILL. Careful, oh, careful.

KIT. I will say I think *Christ* is dead sexy. A radical, a wild man. I think if he were here he'd say love is as sacred as anything else they preach, and I think he'd mean it in every way including the earthly. I think there is heaven in the flesh and I don't think I'll go to hell for it but if I do it was worth it. What do you think Christ got up to, with his prostitutes and his rough boys?

WILL. Don't say that aloud.

KIT. Not even to you?

WILL. Especially not to me. You give me a knife I could murder you with.

KIT. Oh, I don't fear you. Gentle Will, hard-working Will, good Will.

WILL. How many times must I say you don't know me.

KIT. By design. I think your clever talk about the ungraspable nature of God is so much smoke in my eyes, your confession of faith another way to conceal yourself, and so, in a roundabout way, a confession of something to hide. And that is something that some people will find an interesting puzzle to unlock, with force if need be.

WILL. And we're back to that. Can we work now please?

KIT. What, hiding behind that again?

WILL. How is it hiding when it's what we're here for?

KIT. Right. Did you finish Act Three Scene Two, after my bit?

WILL. Oh – really? We're going to work? Do we have time before I'm dragged off to my death?

KIT. You're safe for the moment, I don't want to finish this thing myself.

WILL. It's not funny, though.

KIT. I know.

WILL. Well. All right. Act Three... Oh, Margaret and Suffolk's farewell – well, I think so. I think it's done.

KIT. Let me see.

WILL. Yes – all right – here.

Hands KIT a few pages. KIT starts to read it.

So, first there's your bit, Suffolk raging because he's been banished and has to leave the queen –

KIT (*impatient*). Yes, I know.

WILL. You're awfully good at that. The cursing.

KIT (*smug*). Yes, I know.

He reads Suffolk's part.

'Would curses kill, as doth the mandrake's groan,
I would invent as bitter-searching terms,
As curst, as harsh and horrible to hear,
Deliver'd strongly through my fixed teeth,
With full as many signs of deadly hate,
As lean-faced Envy in her loathsome cave:
My tongue should stumble in mine earnest words;
Mine eyes should sparkle like the beaten flint;
Mine hair be fixed on end, as one distract;
Ay, every joint should seem to curse and ban:
And even now my burthen'd heart would break,
Should I not curse them. Poison be their drink!'

WILL. Right, and that's where I came in, I've got Margaret interrupting him –

Reading Margaret.

'Enough, sweet Suffolk; thou torments thyself,
And these dread curses, like the sun 'gainst glass,
Or like an overcharged gun, recoil,
And turn the force of them upon thyself.'

KIT. 'And turn the force of them', not bad.

WILL. I know. Then Suffolk goes on –

KIT (*reading Suffolk*).

'You bade me ban, and will you bid me leave?
Now, by the ground that I am banish'd from,
Well could I curse away a winter's night,
Though standing naked on a mountain top,
Where biting cold would never let grass grow,
And think it but a minute spent in sport.'

WILL.

'O, let me entreat thee cease. Give me thy hand,'

He takes KIT's hand; they are acting the scene.

'That I may dew it with my mournful tears.
O, could this kiss be printed in thy hand!
So, get thee gone, that I may know my grief.
I will repeal thee, or, be well assured,
Adventure to be banished myself:
And banished I am, if but from thee.
Go; speak not to me; even now be gone.
O, go not yet! Even thus two friends condemned
Embrace and kiss and take ten thousand leaves,
Rather a hundred times to part than die.
Yet now farewell; and farewell life with thee!'

KIT.

'Thus is poor Suffolk ten times banished;
Once by the king, and three times thrice by thee.
'Tis not the land I care for, wert thou thence;
A wilderness is populous enough,
So Suffolk had thy heavenly company.
For where thou art, there is the world itself,
With every several pleasure in the world,
And where thou art not... desolation.'

(*As himself*.) That works.

They separate, themselves again.

WILL. Do you think so?

KIT. Come off it, you know it does. The pit will be *flooded* from the weeping. It's a neat trick you have.

WILL. What?

KIT. Making us fall in love with villains. Suffolk is a traitor, Margaret a whore, they've both betrayed their king. And you've got us crying our eyes out when they're separated. How do you do that?

WILL. Oh. I think perhaps... But you'll only mock me.

KIT. I won't. Not this time.

WILL. It's not clever of me, I know. But the fact is, I can't help loving them. All of them.

KIT. And you reproached *me* for Jack Cade.

WILL. It's not the same thing.

KIT. You lose your heart to the wrong character, it'll be just the same thing.

Bare pause.

Join me.

WILL. Join – ?

KIT. You know what I mean. It's the best way out, really. Be the cat, not the mouse. I know you said no before but you must have thought better of that by now. I'll introduce you to my man, he'll set you up, we can be partners.

WILL. Oh, I –

KIT. There's a mission coming up, you speak a little French, don't you?

WILL. As soon as we're done with this I'm going home for a bit.

KIT. So? Your lodgings are near enough –

WILL. Stratford, I mean.

KIT. Oh, what entertainment can you find in the country? Haven't you brats enough, will you people the *world* with little Wills? Give the poor woman a rest –

WILL. Kit –

KIT. All right, fearsome thing, don't fly at me again. But come with me. Come with me, Will. Come.

WILL (*quoting a poem by KIT*).

'Come live with me and be my love?'

KIT.

'And we will all the pleasures prove...'

WILL. Oh, dear shepherd.

KIT. Is that yes?

Pause.

WILL. I can't.

Slight pause.

It's not that I don't – it's not that I don't –

KIT. There, you're such a bad liar, I don't know what I was thinking, you'd be caught out instantly, you can't even finish that sentence. Never mind. Go back to your dunghill town, breed like a maggot, the more glory for me. Only don't be surprised if I can do nothing for you then.

WILL. Do you know, you've been threatening me since we first met –

KIT. Warning, not threatening –

WILL. It comes to the same thing. And yet I can't help noticing nothing's come of it.

KIT. Are you *daring* me? Not a good plan.

WILL. I can't keep jumping out of my skin with each scare. And the fact is, I think... I think you don't *want* to do me harm. Do you?

KIT. Of course I don't. Of course I don't. Can't you read me by now? I want to wrap you in wool and put you in a trunk and take you out at parties to say, can you *believe* this fool? But he's *my* fool. Harm you, *damn* you, I want to run howling through the world with you like a pack of wild dogs.

WILL. You really ought to get married.

KIT. I'm not like you. I can't trim my sail for every wind. I don't have your *flexibility*. I am that I am, and I can be no other. And that being so. That being so. I make no promises. I have said it over and over.

WILL. That's just it. Over and over. And every time, the dagger's more blunted.

KIT. Jesu, I could weep. You have no idea. Round and round we go, and so the wire snare is *tightened*, not loosened.

WILL. I don't believe you.

KIT. More fool you.

WILL. I don't believe you.

KIT. Will.

WILL. Did I ever actually give you leave to call me Will?

KIT. I feel we're on that footing.

WILL. I can't go with you. But you *could* stay with me.

KIT. What, in the bosom of the family? To wind yarn with Anne and dandle the puking babes? What would we tell the neighbours?

WILL. We could make a home here, in London. I go back and forth already, this could be *our* home, no one would find it amiss, shared lodgings, that's all, we're working together. Fletcher and Beaumont are getting away with it; why shouldn't we? There'll be a little money – I haven't had a chance to tell you – Lord Hunsdon's going to fund a new company, I'll have a three per cent share. You can give up that, that secret world, you can just write. That's what you *ought* to be doing, that's *all* you ought to be doing.

KIT. Come live with me and be my love?

WILL. And we will all the pleasures prove.

KIT. I thought I was meant to be the mad one.

WILL. It is madmen like us who reinvent the world, when no one is noticing. Will you?

Pause.

KIT. I won't.

Slight pause.

I don't want to reinvent the world. I want to live in it, I want to plunder it, I want to rampage through its every part, to fuck it silly and live to tell about it. The world is dangerous and stinking and cruel and so I belong to it utterly. Your utopian vision is ridiculous. You are ridiculous. Did you think I'd say yes? Do you think I'd consent to be your Ganymede, your Gaveston, kept boy to your King Edward?

WILL. I suppose I thought we could both be kings.

KIT. Kings? Kings who wear cobwebbed linen and sweat over poetry in hired lodgings? Do you think poetry paid for *this*? (*Referring to his clothes.*) That secret world as you call it pays for gold buttons and a great deal more; it will keep me from an empty belly and see me into a greatness you cannot dream of with your *three per cent*.

WILL. Quod me nutrit me destruit.

KIT. So you know my motto.

WILL. That which feeds me, destroys me.

KIT. It's just a Latin tag, just a young man's boast, as I was young when I chose it. And I see your point, very clever, but fearing it is what will destroy *you*. Clinging to your safe path. You'll write your whimsical pastorals, your blood-drenched revengers, you'll please the rabble and the censors and hide your greatness for fear of being *seen*.

WILL. Greatness?

KIT. Don't get excited, I just say it's possible. But it won't be, because you're too *small*. You'll bury your true self and remain invisible for all the time to come. Whereas I stand naked to the world's winds and howl howl HOWL along with them, and I will be immortal.

KIT picks up his doublet or something, preparing to go.

You finish the play. It's nearly done anyway. And if Strange wants a third part say yes but ask for more money – and I can tell you right now you'll do the lion's share, I've got other business.

He is nearly at the door.

WILL. Will I have any warning?

KIT stops. Pause.

KIT. If I have any other coin to spend, I will. That's the best I can offer.

KIT exits. WILL looks at the audience, thinks a moment, and shakes his head; no soliloquy.

SLAM. We see KIT constrained, some suggestion of torture, WILL watching in horror from some distance away.

KIT (*shout of pain*). AHHHH, I've told you, I don't care what Tom Kyd said, he's lying, I'm not an atheist, that's only entrapment, ask Cecil, Robert Cecil, I'm working for him, AHHHH –

WILL. NO!

KIT falls silent, looks at him.

No...

KIT (*to his torturers*). It's... It's Will. Will Shakespeare. That's who you want.

WILL (*desperately to the audience*). No. That didn't happen, that won't happen!

SLAM. Both exit, change of lights, some kind of music, change of mood.

Part Three

May 30th, 1593. Early morning. KIT come in cautiously. Maybe he's just in his shirt, stripped of finery. The tavern is closed.

Behind him a strange and frightening figure emerges from the shadow of the doorway, a leather cloak, a leather mask with round glass eyes and a long bird beak. KIT hears the footstep, turns, pulls a dagger.

KIT (*attacking*) and WILL (*recoiling*). AH!

WILL pulls off the mask.

Jesu! What are you playing at, for Christ's sake!

WILL. Did I frighten you?

KIT. What do you think? I nearly gutted you, you damned fool. What the hell are you doing, dressed up for a carnival, you look like a freak.

WILL. Borrowed it off my doctor. Meant to protect against the pestilence. I'll spend a few days smoking myself in the forest before I go home anyway, to be sure.

KIT. Well, I'm taking my own precautions.

WILL. Yes?

KIT. I've been pickling myself with strong wine. I defy a pestilence to find a wholesome infectable ounce of blood in these vinous veins.

WILL. You... don't look well.

KIT. Never better. Take that damned cloak off, I still see that apparition instead of you.

WILL. You're on edge.

KIT. Where I live.

WILL. As I recall. More and more of a knife's edge. I read your latest. Lord, Kit, are you daring them to shut you up?

KIT. Don't presume to lecture me, just because you're flying high.

WILL. I'm not, how can I be with the theatres closed?

KIT. The plague will run its course, the theatres will open again, your deep-pocketed patron will put up whatever you dash off, that's not what I'm talking about. I read your *Venus and Adonis*. I can see I underestimated you. What a hit.

WILL. I had to do something while I waited; poetry served.

KIT. You've risen in the world when you can toss off false modesty so smoothly. It's made your name, look at you, bright as a new penny. But while you've been swanning about, a literary lion –

WILL. Part swan, part lion, what a fabulous beast of antiquity –

KIT. The real world's been ticking along. Tick. Tick. Tick.

WILL. I heard about Tom.

KIT. What did you hear?

WILL. That he was arrested, accused of atheism. They found some papers? Something damning. Doesn't sound like him, to be honest.

KIT. You're wondering if it was me. If I planted them.

WILL. Not wondering, really; I assumed it was.

KIT. One would think so but funnily enough, no. Though I think it was because of me in another way.

WILL. Taking him to get at you?

KIT. Something like that. A message to my friends. Did you hear what they did to him? (*Slight pause.*) Or don't you want to know.

WILL. They put him to the torture.

KIT. Yes. They broke him, our friend Tom. Racked him, stretched him, broke him.

WILL. But he's, he's...

KIT. He's alive, more or less. They let him go, no charges after all.

WILL. Thank God.

KIT. Oh, that's not who Tom should thank. That's not it at all. What do you think he gave them, in return for that release? Had to be something. Or someone. That's right. The little prick cried out my name. *It was Kit Marlowe, the papers were his, he's a damnable atheist, take him, take him and let me go.*

WILL. Well, they must have prompted him, they must have led him –

KIT. I don't blame him. I really don't. How can you blame anyone for what they say when they bring out the instruments? He would have told them Christ Himself was a blasphemer if that's what they wanted him to say.

WILL. I did hear. That you were arrested. Three days ago. But they didn't keep you.

KIT. No.

WILL. They didn't... they didn't hurt you?

KIT. No no. Though I'm only out on sufferance, while they think about what to do with me. I have to report to the council daily. Hence my lingering here.

WILL. Still. A free man, more or less. Your limbs whole, your bones unbroken. Your luck holds.

KIT. We'll see. I told them it was a ruse, my so-called blasphemy, all a part of my cover, drawing men in, claiming to be treacherous in private to make true traitors show their colours. It was persuasive. And Cecil is protecting me. Not for my sake of course but so I won't tell Essex things he'd *much* rather Essex didn't know.

WILL. Right. Powerful friends. Who may well crush you in that triangle you drew me once.

KIT. I'll admit it's tricky. If Essex can't torture evidence out of me I'm no use to him and in fact I'm badly in the way. And Cecil must be getting nervous I'll flip. So yes, it's getting hot, but I've got a plan. I'm meeting some fellows I know today in Deptford, both Essex's and Cecil's. We'll sort it out, I'll promise both sides I'll go away, take myself out of it. I'm thinking Italy. I've got friends there, get out of this filthy muck and into some sunshine.

Slight pause.

And as a token of goodwill, so to speak, I'll give them some names before I go.

WILL. And that's why I'm here?

KIT. You're here because I summoned you. And you leapt on your horse and shot like an arrow into the heart of a plague-raddled city. I wondered if you would come when called, but I never dared dream of such gratifying haste.

WILL. Kit.

KIT. You might not buy me much. A country family of secret Catholics isn't the most valuable of coins just now, not compared to worse things. But you'll go into the pot.

WILL. That's what I thought. Thanks for confirming it.

KIT. You see, they won't let me go if I don't give them something.

WILL. I'm afraid you're not going in any case.

KIT. What?

WILL. I'm sorry. It's stupid of me, but I am sorry.

KIT. What are you blithering about?

WILL. The thing is, it's Raleigh.

KIT. What's Raleigh?

WILL. Raleigh knows you intend to betray him. Tell them all about his occultism, the atheist lectures, the anarchy and treason. Everything Essex wants to get him on.

KIT. He – what? But I *don't*. It's not like that, and anyway I don't intend to tell them anything about him.

WILL. No, but he thinks you do.

KIT. How would you know?

WILL. Because that's what I told him.

Pause.

He sent for me. You can imagine how bewildering for me. How frightening, really. The great man. But he was very kind. He knows, of course, that I know you. He thought I might have some... useful insight.

KIT. I wouldn't have thought it like him.

WILL. It's like anyone. You knew he was a dangerous friend. But did you never think of the reverse? That you're a dangerous friend to him? You're vulnerable now. And as you say, and as he's well aware, everyone talks. Under, under the right pressure.

Slight pause.

So there it is. Yes, you're meeting Essex's and Cecil's men today. But there'll be a third man there. Raleigh's man. And they won't stop his knife. It'll solve everyone's problems. Well, not *all* their problems. But one Kit Marlowe-shaped problem.

KIT. I really did underestimate you.

WILL. I did what I had to, isn't that what you always told me to do? Raleigh loved *Part Three*, by the way.

KIT. I thought he had better taste.

WILL. He mentioned Act One Scene Three in particular, I told him that was your bit. 'So looks the pent-up lion o'er the wretch' –

KIT. 'That trembles under his devouring paws.'

Slight pause.

So, you've joined my world after all.

WILL. No, no, I've done no cloak-and-dagger work, he *asked* me and I... But why should I have spared you? You already held your knife at my throat. Didn't you? Didn't you just say, isn't that what you sent for me to tell me? That you'd finally come to the bottom of your purse where I lay, a tarnished coin to be paid at last?

KIT. Yes.

WILL. So. If it was you or me.

KIT. Then me, apparently. Well, I think we're done here.

WILL. Don't go. To Deptford, don't go.

KIT. Could you possibly be more inconsistent? Put the noose round my neck and say don't jump?

WILL. Can't you run? Your friends abroad. Italy.

KIT. I'd never reach them. Do you think I go about unwatched? No, don't worry, you came in fancy dress, remember? Leave the same way, they'll never know you were here. You'll be fine, you and your brilliant career, Will who would, it turns out.

WILL. Can we not.

KIT. While I stop here, where I am, as I am. I'm glad I wrote fast, while I had the chance, at least I'll leave something behind.

WILL. No but, there must be something, can't we think of something?

KIT. Don't torment yourself. The clock was always ticking for me, don't you think? Amazing I've lived this long. And I'd so much rather a swift dagger than the executioner's art. You've done me a great favour, helping to bring me to my reckoning. Will you weep for me though? Are you near weeping already? Oh, my poor fool.

WILL. This will destroy me.

KIT. Nonsense, it'll be the making of you. You've devoured me, just as you feared I'd devour you. I'll go on in you, I'll haunt you forever. Right? Say I'll haunt you. Say it.

WILL. You will.

KIT. Say you'll be more than I ever would have been and it'll be worth it. It won't be true, but say it.

WILL. I will.

KIT. Say you loved me more, far, far more, than I loved you.

WILL. Of course I did.

KIT. That's not true either; I'd have murdered anyone else by now, wouldn't I? There's your proof if you need it. Right, I'm off. Wait a bit before you leave, I'll draw the watchers off.

WILL. Kit.

KIT. No more. I'm not Suffolk and you're not Margaret. We don't get the heartbreaking farewell, we aren't the stuff of tragedy. We are timorous rats in the shadows of the great men and that great hag who rules them. You survive to keep your nest warm and feast on their rich scraps, and I go to be shaken in the teeth of the world, like most rats do. Not a great king, not a great villain, just the jumped up son of a shoemaker who had a good run of it.

Slight pause.

Remember me, though.

WILL. I will.

KIT. That's something then.

He exits. WILL turns to the audience.

WILL. Yeah... did that happen? It's true, Kit went to his reckoning and I... well, you know.

I will say... I'm ever after writing Kit back to life, writing breath back into his lungs, again and again; even when I

think I've left him behind – ah, there he is again. There it is. Forgiveness, absolution, death and resurrection, love lost and found – it's all we can do, all of us grievous grieving souls, forever willing our immortal longings into whatever being our pitiful powers may. Oh Kit. You should have died hereafter, you should have lived. I wish I could tell you: I did what you asked of me. I kept my promises. Do you hear me? I kept my promise.

End of Play.

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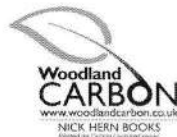
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- "O, Jesus bless us, he is born with teeth!"
And so was I, which plainly signified
That I should snarl and bite, play the dog.'
Henry VI, Part 3
- Christopher Marlowe – rockstar of
Elizabethan theatre and notorious spy for
the Crown – danger and seduction combined.
William Shakespeare – jobbing actor and
promising young playwright – dazzled by
Marlowe, but with ambitions of his own.
- When the pair meet in the backroom of a
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tensions rise as they navigate the perils of
art under an oppressive regime, and flirt like
young men with everything to lose...
- An explosively entertaining duel of wits,
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is a playful and daring imagining of the
relationship between two literary icons.
The play was first performed in Houston,
Texas, in 2022, where it won several major
awards. In 2025, it received its European
premiere at Wyndham's Theatre in London's
West End, produced by Playful Productions,
the Royal Shakespeare Company and
Elizabeth Williams Productions, directed by
RSC Co-Artistic Director Daniel Evans, and
starring Ncuti Gatwa as Kit and Edward
Blumel as Will.
- Liz Duffy Adams is an award-winning
American playwright whose other plays
include *Or;*, *Dog Act*, *The Salonnières*, *A
Discourse on the Wonders of the Invisible
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- 'Adams writes not with a pen so much as
a razor blade, and the play cuts to the bone
as Kit and Will trade barbs, ambitions and,
ultimately, places in a history play that
rewrites our understanding of these two
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